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CHALK STREAM TROUT

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NYMPH FISHING
FOR
CHALK STREAM TROUT

BY
G. E. M. SKUES
(SEAFORTH AND SOFORTH)

ADAM & CHARLES BLACK
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Happy the man who, studying nature's laws,
From known effects can trace the secret cause.

Whatever here I may declaim
The very clever folk I sing to
Will most indubitably cling to
Their pet delusions all the same.

(With apologies to RUDYARD KIPLING)

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NYMPH FISHING FOR CHALK STREAM TROUT

I

APOLOGIA

A GOOD many years ago I vowed by the Nine Gods—in effectual beasts—that never again would I be guilty of a book. Years after, like a fool, I let myself be jockeyed against my better judgment into allowing the publication in book form of a collection of the angling oddments which from time to time I had committed to the periodical press. Some good man—I forget who it was—said “*Indignatio facit versus*”—and now in the beginning of my Eighties I find myself impelled by that same emotion to go back once more on my pledge to the Nine Gods.

In writing of the art of trout fishing with the fly, my contribution to knowledge has by degrees led, viâ the resuscitation of the use of the wet fly on chalk streams, to the practice of the use of life-like representations of the natural nymph. And while every fresh day's experience of the practice of nymph fishing has confirmed me in my conviction that I have been moving in the right direction, and while the practice appeared to find acceptance on almost every hand, I find in my latter days there seems to be a movement on foot designed to re-rivet on the chalk stream angler the fetters of dry-fly purism from which I thought common sense and the experience of the last quarter of a century had shaken him finally free.

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Whether that movement be due to the revolt—in my opinion quite a legitimate revolt—on the part of a section of chalk stream anglers against the use by some anglers on chalk streams of lures supplied to them by—presumably ignorant—tackle dealers under the name of nymphs, but which bear no resemblance to the larval stage of the *Ephemeroptera*, to which alone the term “nymph” may legitimately be applied, or to some more obscure cause, I feel driven, in my old age, to attempt the task of describing fully and in detail what I conceive to be the true and proper practice of nymph fishing, and of establishing its justification. I shall no doubt fail to convince those who do not wish to be convinced, but at least I shall have done my best. If only I could persuade anglers to take out with them regularly a marrow scoop to extract the contents of the stomachs of their trout (without the dilatory and horrid mess of an autopsy), and a white-enamelled cup into which to wash out these contents, so as to analyse them and see what the trout are really eating, I might have some hope, for they would learn when the trout are taking winged flies and when nymphs and what nymphs are really like, and realise the justification of nymph fishing as a valuable branch of the chalk stream angler’s art.

I am conscious that the volume contains a number of repetitions, but I have had to choose between making them and crippling my argument by innumerable cross-references, So I pray the forgiveness of my readers.

G. E. M. S.

II

HISTORY AND EVOLUTION

IT may perhaps be recognised as desirable that I should set out historically how nymph fishing has developed out of the old art of wet-fly fishing as practised by our forebears on chalk streams.

Before the dry fly became dominant on chalk streams two or more flies were used on a cast, and there can be little doubt that in still weather it was found difficult, if not impossible, for really good chalk stream trout to be taken with the wet fly on account of drag, and that to achieve success a definite ruffle was necessary. The angling books from Cotton onward give few clues to enable one to comprehend the methods employed, but one infers that the flies of those days must have been cast more or less downstream. The best authority that can be quoted on the subject is to be found in the *Diary of a Test Fisherman* (the Rev. Richard Durnford) covering the years 1809 to 1819, and published in 1911 by Mr Henry Nicoll. From this record it appears that little success was possible on chalk streams without a fairly strong breeze—sometimes described by the diarist as a “whistling wind”, at other times as a “sufficient” wind. The Diary gives little information to guide one as to whether the fishing was up-stream or down or across, but it may be inferred that it was more often down and across or down than otherwise but invariably with the wind. The type of rod then favoured (long and soft in action) necessitated fishing with the wind. Yet

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substantial success was recorded on most of the occasions which took the Reverend diarist to the waterside. On many occasions he mentions that a Caperer or bob fly was necessary "to steady the cast". And on several occasions he refers to the throats of the trout being full of the "nymphae of the gnats ascending through the water before they take wing". So far as I know this is the only record of pre-dry-fly times which indicates that the angler realised that his fish were taking the natural insect in that stage. The patterns of artificial fly illustrated in the Diary suggest that the fly was taken for an up-winged dun in the act of hatching. Col. Peter Hawker, a mighty Test angler of the beginning of the 19th century, always fished two flies down-stream. It seems that at that period of angling history, when trout were taking duns at the surface the artificial fly was considered useless except on rough and windy days, and anglers either stayed at home or used minnows or the cross line. The flies tied to gut which were used on the Itchen in the middle 'seventies when I was a boy at Winchester were more nymph-like in shape than the Rev. Richard Durnford's patterns, though they were supposed to be, and in fact were, used dry. And it was not until H. S. Hall had evolved the eyed hook for floating flies, and with it worked out the method of winging split-winged floaters, that the old type of fly was abandoned on chalk streams. For the old type see illustration at the head of the frontispiece. It is still in use for down-stream fishing on many rough rivers, having what is known as "a good entry". The dry fly was not hinted at in angling literature until 1841—(G. P. R. Pulman, *Angler's Vade-Mecum*, 1841 and 1846)—and was first definitely described in the same author's Third Edition, 1851. It was however in use on the Itchen before 1857, for it is described in the *Field* that year by Francis

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Francis as an established institution on that river, though he says "on rough windy days they get drowned and trout will take the wet fly as well as a dry one or even better". Halford found the dry fly established on the Wandle in 1867. It was definitely dominant on the Itchen when I was at Winchester as a boy in 1875. Curiously, the dry fly is not mentioned in the records of the Houghton Club down to 1908, though it must have been in use in the 'eighties, but fishing with the cross line and the blow line went on on the Test long after they had been abandoned on other chalk streams in favour of the floating fly.

G. S. Marryat, who was probably the greatest expert with the dry fly that ever lived, was brought up on the Dorsetshire Frome and fished it with the wet fly downstream in his youth. He returned from Australia in or about the 'seventies, but when Halford and he met in John Hammond's shop at Winchester in 1879 he was already the finished expert with the dry fly. It was however only in that year that he came into touch with H. S. Hall who was then elaborating his famous patterns of the eyed hook, and they worked out together the early methods of dressing the split winged floater.

Soon afterwards, in 1885, H. S. Hall wrote of the dry fly in the Badminton Library and shortly afterwards (in 1886) F. M. Halford's *Floating Flies and how to Dress Them* was published, followed early in 1889 by *Dry Fly Fishing in Theory and Practice*, after which the dry fly on chalk streams became at first a rage and then a religion.

Quite naturally it was contrasted with the only method previously in use on chalk streams (if we exclude the cross line and the blow line), viz. the wet fly fished with the wind and in general down-stream and searching the water. It became the fashion for dry-fly fishers to speak disparagingly

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of their immediate predecessors. They were represented as clumsy floggers of the water. Many no doubt deserved this reproach, but there must have been some extremely clever anglers among them. The dominant feature of dry-fly fishing was the casting of the floating fly up-stream to individual fish, and it had the great merit that it could be done in calm and bright weather—which was an impossibility for the down-stream dragging fly. Then for many years it does not seem to have occurred to anyone to try casting the wet fly up-stream to individual fish, and that it too could be done in calm and bright weather, and F. M. Halford does not seem even to have suspected that it could be done. Indeed the heavy tapered oiled silk lines and the powerful and heavy split-cane rods then deemed necessary for dry-fly fishing were quite unsuitable for delivering a wet fly to an individual fish, especially against a wind. No doubt a few anglers here and there used a wet fly on chalk streams and caught fish, but, so far as any record goes, without reasoning out the justifications for their methods. Indeed from first to last and down to to-day the ignorance of the vast majority of even highly-experienced anglers of the very existence of the nymph, its form and character, is astonishing. Similarly the vast majority of chalk stream anglers (Halford among them) kept on casting a succession of dry flies to feeding trout which were seen to be breaking the surface, most of such anglers being wholly unconscious that for hours and days at a time these trout were feeding on nymphs and were letting the natural hatched-out insect go by. Still when all was said and done the dry fly came in because in conditions often prevalent on chalk streams it made the catching of trout easier. For years I was equally unconscious. But in the later 'nineties the difficulty of inducing bulging trout to take the floating

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fly, combined with the obvious fact that they were feeding on nymphs, led me (and no doubt others) to experiment on bulgers with patterns of wet flies which were successful on rough North Country streams where trout were seldom seen to break the surface, and to cast these flies up-stream to the bulging fish.

From this beginning there naturally came to my mind the question, why, if the wet fly on chalk streams had brought great baskets in the past, it should have lost its efficacy with the advent of the dry fly. I had no desire (and indeed no need) to search the water by random casting. Trout rose too freely in the chalk streams which I fished to render such searching necessary; and I soon found that there were occasions when the winged wet fly, cast up-stream to feeding fish, was quite efficacious, though it was a long time before I realised that these occasions occurred nearly always when the trout were nymphing and not taking the floating fly.

I had supposed for a long time that the wet fly was taken on these occasions for a nymph in the very act of hatching. But after a while the presence in the mouths of some of my captures of nymphs with no show of wing led me to experiment with short hackled patterns dressed to imitate nymphs, and by 1910 when my first volume, *Minor Tactics of the Chalk Stream*, was published, though it dealt in the main with the use of the up-stream wet fly cast to individual fish, I had dressed and tried with some success a small series of nymphal patterns, fishing them in calm and bright weather like floating flies, but under water. In the succeeding eleven years I had made other attempts to represent nymphs—but I was hampered by the need to carry out hateful and messy autopsies to ascertain on what my trout were feeding, until towards the end of that period I

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was struck with the idea of using a marrow scoop to extract the contents of the trout's stomach in a single operation. The method proved completely successful, and time after time I was amazed to see what a huge proportion of these contents were nymphs—and how few were the winged flies. From this I moved on to the device of washing out these contents into a deep heavy white china plate (a baby plate proved ideal for the purpose); and, having it with the insects floating therein by my side on my fly-dressing table, I was able to dress (and compare in the water by the side of the natural insects) representations of the nymphs I had extracted, resembling them in size, contour, proportions and colour. I did not need to use these patterns when the trout were feeding on the surface, for then the dry fly was at once easier and more effective—but on those many occasions when the trout have been devoting their attention to the nymph and neglecting the floating fly I have found the appropriate pattern of nymph great medicine, however bright the weather and however smooth the water.

I have not hesitated, therefore, to do my best to let others share the benefit of my labours—being convinced that without any challenge to the merits of dry-fly fishing in its proper place I have evolved methods which are often effective where it fails.

III

DEFINITIONS

WHAT IS A NYMPH?

THE term nymph for the purposes of this little volume denotes a larva of one or other of the Ephemeroptera which has reached a stage in its growth when the cases on its shoulders containing the growing wings have become obvious. For the benefit of those anglers who are not aware of the life-history of the Ephemeroptera let me explain that the eggs of the perfect females of the Ephemeroptera are dropped or laid in the water, where in due course they hatch out as larvae and go through a series of under-water stages in weeds or mud or sand, eventually developing on their thorax cases which contain the wings which are only unfolded when the insect leaves the water for the air. In the final subaqueous stages the shape of the insects, apart from the wings and apart from the length of the setae, is very much what it will assume when hatched out into the air.

An artificial nymph is a pattern dressed on a hook to attract trout and grayling, and representing in size, colour and appearance one or other of the types of natural nymph. No artificial lure or fancy fly has a nymphal stage in its development, and it follows that there can be no nymph of the Bloody Butcher, the Professor, the Grizzly King, the Wickham's Fancy, nor any other fancy fly. Nor can beetles, with or without long whisks like the Spinners of up-winged duns; nor can hairy and shapeless objects, bearing no resemblance to natural nymphs, be properly classed as

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artificial nymphs; nor can artificial flies, hackled either profusely or lightly with full-sized hackles, be so classed. The latter types, in my judgment, where they suggest any insect at all, represent flies wrecked by stream or wave, raindrop or wind, generally in the moment of hatching, and they owe their attraction to the mobility of their hackles in the water. The others are frankly nothing but lures, no better in any respect than salmon flies, sea-trout flies, Alexandras, Demons, and other fancy patterns which are justly barred on chalk streams as illegitimate. The only type of pattern properly and justly called an artificial nymph is like in colour, dimensions, outline and proportion to a natural nymph of one or other of the *Ephemeroptera*; and the use of any of the other types, which I have classed as illegitimate, on chalk streams under the title of nymph only serves to discredit the true art of nymph fishing and to lend a handle to these dry-fly fanatics (and there are such) who want to put back the clock and re-establish the rigid and exclusive despotism of the dry fly.

From the illustration, at page 16, of the contents of a trout's stomach consisting mainly of natural nymphs, it may be seen that nymphs have only short legs and that there is no excuse for representing them with long' hackles, like North Country hackled wet flies. These latter are sometimes said to represent nymphs—but they can only do so if fished dragging down-stream so that the hackles closely clasp the body—but this method of fishing is one which I would bar as involving casting at random and searching the water and as leading to catching or pricking undersized fish. Artificial nymphs, properly understood, have not silver bodies and scarlet legs like the Bloody Butcher. They have modest little wing cases on the thorax which do *not* extend all down the back, like the wing cases of a beetle. They are

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not long haired, though many have branchiae or breathing processes at their sides. They have very short whisks, which do not extend from the tail like the long whisks of Imagines. They have neatly tapered bodies (mainly translucent) with opaque thorax and often a definitely coloured head which may be suggested in the artificial representation by the exposed tying silk. And they do *not* offend the modesty of nature. I may here mention that the nymphs illustrated in the plate are of a very small type, having been taken in August—all previous extracts of the contents of trout's stomach containing larger nymphs have proved unsuitable for illustration partly because of the admixture of much semi-digested matter and partly because the nymphs were so numerous that nearly all detail would have been lost in an attempt to reproduce them as an illustration. Those on the inset are the normal size taken earlier in the year.

Later on in this volume I shall be giving dressings of nymphs which I have found successful on the Itchen and elsewhere—but I may say at once that I am not laying down these dressings as standards or attempting to stereotype patterns. On the contrary, they are merely illustrations, and I would have the angler make his own representations. Several times each year I find myself producing some new and often successful pattern to simulate in colour, shape and dimensions the natural nymphs which I have freshly extracted from the maw of the day's trout, to find my profit in the next day's or maybe the next weekend's basket.

Tackle dealers in general, wholesale or retail, with few exceptions (of whom Mr Roger Woolley of Hatton, Derby, and Mr T. J. Hanna of Stonard Street, Moneymore, Co. Derry, are bright examples), make little effort at genuine representations of the natural nymph. Indeed it is difficult

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to believe that most of them ever saw a natural nymph or have any notion of what it is like. But, while purporting to cater for the demand for nymphs they produce and sell a series of lures bearing little or no resemblance to the natural nymph, but which may at times in favourable conditions prove effective in taking occasional trout in much the same way as the sea-trout fly, the small Salmon fly and the Alexandra—all rightly barred on chalk streams.

With such lures I beg the would-be nymph fisher to have nothing to do. Let him study the natural nymph as taken from the crops of trout on capture, and dress representations if he can do so, or at any rate get them dressed by some conscientious fly-dresser. The dressing of nymph patterns, as I shall show later, is a comparatively simple matter, and it constitutes an additional pleasure, to be enjoyed by the angler, which need not be despised.

The angling press, if only it were so disposed, might do much to promote a proper understanding of what nymphs really are and how their representations should be dressed, and to discourage the application of that title by tackle dealers to lures like beetles with long whiskers and to numerous other confections which bear no resemblance whatever to the natural insect. If they would do this they would deprive anglers using these illegitimate objects on chalk streams of the excuse, "Oh, I bought this of Messrs Blank as a nymph". These lures only cast an undeserved discredit on the practice of legitimate nymph fishing.

I should like those who have been tempted into buying those alleged nymphs from tackle dealers to compare them with the natural nymphs newly extracted from the belly of a trout and to learn to know better.

Those who have been putting on the market the monstrosities of which I complain have not—or at least are not

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entitled to claim—even Dr Johnson's excuse, “Ignorance—sheer Ignorance, Madam”; for the books of Halford and Mosely—long ago angling classics—contain illustrations of the natural nymph which deprive them of that excuse. Members of the Fly Fishers' Club, with its cabinet of natural insects collected and preserved by F. M. Halford and Martin E. Mosely, have even less excuse for ignorance. But anglers may be assured that so long as their own ignorance and idleness enables them to be fooled, fooled they will be.

WHAT IS NYMPH FISHING?

In this work then nymph fishing must, please, be understood to mean the art of taking trout or grayling at or under the surface with an artificial pattern credibly representing in colour, dimensions and outline a natural nymph of a type being accepted by trout and grayling on the stream which is being fished, and designed to be taken by the fish as such, and presenting such patterns to the trout in conditions to deceive them into believing them to be natural nymphs brought to them by the current.

Nymph fishing is not a sport by itself. It is auxiliary to the floating fly. It is a method, just as was and is the use of the wet fly on chalk streams, of taking trout and grayling which are not rising to the floating natural insect but are feeding. It is a method of presenting to the fish in these conditions representations of the food on which they are actually feeding far more precise than the wet fly (which at best *may* be taken for a hatching nymph) and not less, but probably more, exact than floating artificial flies are of the floating natural duns—or spinners. And just as the time to present the floating fly to the fish is when they are taking natural flies on the surface—so are the times to offer the fish

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an artificial nymph the hours, often prolonged, in which they are feeding wholly or mainly on the natural nymph. To my mind it is no more ethical (*i.e.* fair to other anglers and to the fishing) to hammer a nymphing fish with floating flies than to pester a surface-feeding fish with artificial nymphs. Indeed it is less so, for the persistently-presented floater, however well presented, is more likely to scare and put down a nymphing fish than an artificial nymph, even less well presented, is likely to scare a surface-feeding trout. And on the whole there is a slightly better chance of an artificial nymph taking a surface-feeding trout than of a floating artificial taking a nymphing fish. That is my experience, resulting from years of practice of both methods.

Nymph fishing is a comparatively new art, or perhaps it would be fairer to say a new phase of an old and largely forgotten art that has developed on chalk streams during the present century. The old art was the art of the wet fly as practised on chalk streams for centuries before the advent of the dry fly led, through the work of F. M. Halford, George Selwyn Marryat and others, to the supersession on chalk streams of the older method by the new, and for a while to the complete and exclusive dominance of the latter. The dry fly became a sort of religion and any attempt to revert to the older practice was regarded as a sort of sin against the Holy Ghost for which there was no remission. A few men however, natural born heretics no doubt, being of the detached order of intellect, came in time to wonder why the old art which had for centuries served our forefathers so well should have ceased to be effective and to have any merits, and they began to experiment by adapting to wet-fly fishing the new dry-fly method of casting the fly to individual rising fish, and they attained a degree of success which became embarrassing to the stern upholders

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of the strict faith of the dry fly. The practice led these heretics to enquire how it came about that trout were willing to accept winged flies under water; and, aided by autopsies as advocated by Halford, they became aware of a fact of which Halford was well aware, but the moral of which he had failed to appreciate, that rising trout fed more on nymphs than on their floating hatched-out subimagines. To this day it is probable that comparatively few of the enormous number of fishers with the fly are aware of this fact or of its bearing on the art of fly fishing and fewer still have any idea of what a natural nymph is like. But these wicked heretics decided that if the trout were willing, as for centuries they had proved themselves, to take winged artificial flies under water, it was not improbable that they would be still more willing in similar conditions (despite Halford's pronouncements to the contrary) to take under water well-conceived patterns representing as faithfully as possible the larval forms on which they were for the time being feeding, and that these patterns, like the wet flies with which these sinners had been previously experimenting, could be presented to the individual trout with all the pomp and circumstance of accuracy and avoidance of undersized fish which had been hitherto the exclusive privilege of the floating fly. Much to the chagrin of the arch-purists, these heretics proved to be right, and by degrees a small school of fishers of chalk streams with the artificial nymph began to invade the most sacred stretches of the Hampshire rivers and their practice even extended to other rivers, such as the Usk, which had not been sacred to the dry fly. But I must emphasise the fact that, just as in *Minor Tactics of the Chalk Stream* I did not advocate, and indeed definitely disapproved of, what Halford termed fishing the water, but did advocate fishing the wet fly to the individual

subaqueously feeding fish, in my advocacy of the use of the nymph on appropriate occasions, I apply precisely the same principles in practice. It is therefore out of place to cite against me the practices of the uninitiated anglers who fish the water with the nymph, searching it with a dragging nymph and taking or pricking and scaring unsizable fish.

FISH "IN POSITION"

At page 130 of *The Dry Fly Man's Handbook* Halford gives a definition of a fish in position the first sentence of which I can adopt without qualification:

When a trout has poised itself near the surface and is steadily taking duns or other flies without any great movement laterally or up or down the stream, it is said to be *in position*. When a fish in position is lying close to the bank and is rising freely, the angler on the same bank has found one under ideal conditions for the dry-fly fisherman, and may confidently expect a rise to his fly, if he is using the right pattern and succeeds in presenting it at the right moment and in such a way that the fish does not realize that it is being fished for, and its suspicions are, therefore, not aroused.

As to the second part I find it necessary to qualify what Halford says as follows: "the angler has found a fish in ideal conditions for the dry fly *or the nymph, according to what the fish may be taking at the moment*". With that qualification I can accept the rest of the paragraph. It will be noted, however, that Halford entirely ignores, both here and throughout the volume, the frequent occasions when the trout is equally in position but is *not* taking duns and *is* taking nymphs. In this connection I am not alluding to the occasions where trout are bulging.



IV

THE WAY OF A TROUT WITH A NYMPH

THERE are two states in which the natural nymph is taken by the trout—first in the active larval stage and second (and to the angler far more important) in the practically inert stage in which the mature nymph arriving at the surface to split its final nymphal envelope and to emerge as a subimago often reaches them.

The active nymphs may be routed out and pursued by the trout from their shelter in weeds or silt. This may be done in water so deep as to afford no clue or opportunity to the angler. In shallower water it is apt to produce the evidence of activity known as tailing, giving the angler a fairly precise indication where he may cast to his fish, but the opportunities thus afforded are few and the angler is handicapped by the fact that the natural nymphs which the trout are pursuing are in one or other of their active stages and cannot be accurately represented in action.

Where trout are bulging in the correct sense of the word (*i.e.* rushing about over weeds in comparatively shallow water, pursuing nymphs which emerge from their shelter in weeds, and making a bulge in turning as each nymph is captured), the nymph may be more or less active or it may be almost inert. In his chapter on “Nymphs and Bulgers” in *Fly Fishing: Some New Arts and Mysteries* (1915) Dr Mottram gives an interesting description of what he had observed on occasions when trout were bulging to nymphs. He writes:

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The nymph may be seen coming down-stream, but often diverging to one side or the other, at the same time rising slowly to the surface: the motion is quite slow and even, not in the least fast or jerky, and a bulging fish, although he is quiet in his motions, is obviously not chasing nymphs but moving now to this side, now to that, in order to meet the nymph coming down.

He regards the nymph at this stage as swimming—and I think he is probably right, for I have so often seen trout bulging furiously over weeds, as if the nymphs emerging from shelter were numerous, while the hatch of subimagines is scanty or almost non-existent; so that it seems as if there were occasions when the nymph emerged and, if uncaptured by the trout, remained active enough to return to its fastnesses or to take refuge in others. Moreover, according to Dr Mottram the trout in these conditions is prone to take a dragging artificial nymph, a fact which rather suggests that he is in pursuit of nymphs of which some at any rate show a degree of activity.

There is another occasion on which the active nymphs may be taken, viz. after weed-cutting, when the nymphs, feeling their weed homes cut away from their stalks, seek shelter in bays and eddies under the banks—and are there found by the trout. Often, too, when cut floating weeds are coming down-stream trout may be seen rising among them—undoubtedly taking the active nymphs which are deserting or drifting out of the cut weeds.

The commonest occasion known in which the trout feeds on the nymph on its way to hatch is when he lies in position under a bank or in a run, poised to meet and accept without excitement or pursuit the mature nymphs brought to him helpless by the current. On such occasions it is often extremely difficult for the angler to detect whether the fish is taking nymph or subimago, for there may be, and often is,

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a string of hatched duns coming over him on the same line of current as brings the nymphs. Yet quite frequently the fish will be found to be taking the nymph to the exclusion of the winged dun, and that for hours at a time.

Dr Mottram on his next page makes a distinction between the swimming nymph and the floating nymph which I call the inert nymph, and describes the way in which fish take the latter:

The fish is taking just beneath the surface of the water nymphs which are floating down and about to burst their cases in order to change into duns.

He calls the fish thus feeding on floating nymphs a dimpling fish in contradistinction from the bulger, feeding on swimming nymphs. He adds a little later of the floating nymph: "In this position they are motionless with legs and tail extended in the position of rest".

At times during a hatch of duns, trout, often large, may be seen questing about near the surface in mid-stream and taking the nymphs which are ascending from the river-bed as they find them, generally breaking or humping the surface when they effect a capture. And occasionally trout, when in the height of condition, may be observed hovering in the fastest part of the stream, not moving far from one spot and intercepting just below the surface the nymphs on their way to hatch, and at times doing so without breaking the surface.

It will thus be seen that the occasions most favourable to the angler fishing to individual selected fish are those when he is taking the mature and, for the moment, practically inert nymph on its way to hatch.

As a matter of fact it does not seem to have been realised for many years after the advent of the dry fly what a large proportion of the rising of trout under banks, and indeed

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in the open (other than bulging), is to nymphs on their way to the surface to hatch, with the result that many a fish so rising has been vainly hammered by anglers with floating flies.

The due appreciation of *how* a trout is rising forms the very essence of fishing, whether it be with floating fly or artificial nymph—and it is often no easy matter.

I have been assured on authority, which I will quote later on, from Mr Martin E. Moseley and Mr F. S. K. Pentelow (1) that the nymph coming to the surface is not inert but active, and (2) that it is not helped to the surface by being distended by some gas or lubricant, as I ignorantly inferred from my thirty years' experience of catching trout in the conditions above described with artificial nymphs. I propose therefore to give the reasons which led me to my conclusions.

I find Halford in *Dry Fly Fishing* in the chapter on Bulging distinguishing mature nymphs from immature partly by the fact that the former float.

After having opened his trout and turned the undigested portion of the contents of its stomach into a vessel of water, Halford proceeds (p. 233):

The first thing that will strike the observant student is that one portion of the food is lighter than water, and, therefore, floating on the surface, but that a far larger proportion is of greater specific gravity and hence sinks to the bottom. The floating portion consists of winged insects and nymphae just on the point of assuming the winged state. It may fairly be asked how this last fact can be ascertained, and anyone taking the trouble can easily prove the question to his own satisfaction. Let him take two or three of the floating nymphae and as many of the sunk ones, and soak them for a few minutes in water in which is dissolved a small piece of ordinary washing soda . . . to counteract the action of the digestive fluid which is strongly acid. . . .

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And after describing a process to bring about transparency, he proceeds on page 234:

A great contrast will be at once apparent between those that floated and those that sank. In everyone that floated it will be seen that inside the setae or tail of the nymph are plainly visible the setae of the subimago which is just about emerging from it; and in the same way, in each of the six legs, in the head, in each antenna and even in the abdomen itself the distinct outline with every detail of the corresponding limb or organ of the subimago may be seen.

In fact, in general appearance the nymph consists of two distinct portions, the inner or solid-looking portion being the subimago complete in all its parts, excepting that the wings are folded up inside a pair of somewhat oval-shaped wing covers; this subimago is, however, entirely enveloped in a thin transparent covering which is perceptibly larger than and projects beyond the outline of the insect itself. Attached to this apparently loose covering are all the organs which are especially provided for the larvae living in the water and not required for its subsequent or winged stage, and these organs are, without exception, shed with the larval envelope. . . . The less developed nymphs which sank in the water, when the autopsy was originally performed have, however, quite a different appearance. There is little or no appearance of the larval covering being loose; the setae and legs are solid-looking limbs, the latter often armed with formidable claws . . . in fact, there is no indication of an impending metamorphosis. In considering the deductions to be drawn from the comparison between the proportionate quantity of sunk and floating nymphs from the autopsy it must be remembered that all of the floating specimens were nymphae rising to the surface for the purpose of emerging from the envelope in the subimago stage, while the sunk ones were down among the gravel and must be considered as bottom food.

At this stage it may not be out of place to note that I deduced from the paragraphs quoted (1) that "nymph" about to hatch must have the envelope distended with a view to its splitting when relieved of water pressure on attaining the surface and with the preliminary object of

helping to bring it to the surface, and (2) that in its ascent to the surface the nymph is comparatively inactive. I did not profess to know whether the distension be due to gas developed within the envelope or to some light lubricant, facilitating eclosion. If however (as appears to be the case) the mature nymph floats, it is not very material to the argument to establish what makes it do so.

I find Dr Mottram describing the mature nymph taken by the trout just under the surface as "floating" and "motionless" (entirely in accord with my experience). Then the three authors of the Lonsdale Book on *River Management* say that trout often "take nymphs floating at the surface". And I would respectfully invite those who challenge my suggested explanation of the distension of the nymph about to hatch to explain how otherwise the bulk of the nymph about to hatch could be increased without increase of weight so as to bring about a decrease of specific gravity leading to flotation. On the question of the inertness of the hatching nymph I had however, independently of Dr Mottram and before the publication of the passages quoted from his book, long come to the conclusion on my own observation that the mature nymph at the stage when nearing the surface to hatch is practically inert, having caught scores of good fish feeding subaqueously in position with artificial nymphs which made no pretence of imitating the motions of an active nymph, and this in despite of Halford's dictum at pages 144 and 145 of *Dry Fly Fishing*, that the trout will not look at it. Here the reason given by Halford for the alleged non-success of the artificial nymph is the supposed activity of the natural nymph. (I am told he used to quote Marryat as saying frequently, "You can imitate the nymph but you cannot imitate its wriggle"—but I would point out that his experiment with the nymphs extracted from a handful of

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weed from the bed of the river is fallacious, as of course the nymphae from the weeds at the bed of the river would be active.) But that does not prevent an entirely different state of things from prevailing when the nymph is nearing the surface, about in a few moments to split its integument and emerge as a subimago. And I infer in despite of anything said to the contrary, that the nymph in such conditions is correctly described by Dr Mottram as motionless, and that there is therefore no need to imitate its then non-existent wriggle—and that a well-dressed imitation does *not* look unnatural to the trout feeding subaqueously.

Further grounds for believing the mature nymph to be practically inert when on its way to hatch out were (1) that it is rare—indeed practically unknown¹—to find an active nymph in the maw of a trout taken in such conditions; (2) that the nymphing trout may be observed, particularly when under a bank, intercepting the nymphs brought to him by the current without excitement or pursuit such as one might expect if the nymph were active and able to try to escape—such pursuit indeed as one sees when a tailing trout follows and catches—or misses—a nymph or shrimp which he has routed out of the weeds.

It is moreover—it seems to me—not unreasonable to suppose that at the moment when a nymph comes up to hatch he secretes within his nymphal envelope a liquid or gas which by distending his shuck and increasing his bulk without adding to his weight assists his progress to the surface, and puts a pressure from within which breaks the skin as soon as the pressure of the water is relieved by the insect having reached the surface. On these occasions no more activity would be necessary than just enough to enable the nymph to maintain its balance and to reach the surface with

¹ I found one (my first) in a 2½ pounder caught in August 1938.

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its back upwards so as to be the right way up for hatching.

I have already quoted from pages 233-235 of *Dry Fly Fishing in Theory and Practice* Halford's description of a mature nymph observed under a microscope which is at least not inconsistent with my suggestion.

Here Halford clearly distinguishes the mature nymph from the immature—the mature showing the complete sub-imago floating and enveloped in what he describes as an apparently loose covering.

Now this covering includes the eyes of the nymph; and Halford shows that this covering is shed in the act of hatching. It did not seem to me an unwarrantable deduction to infer that when the nymph is ascending to hatch out with its eye-coverings and its breathing apparatus on the verge of detachment it will not for the moment have a degree of eyesight and power of movement such as would enable the active immature nymph to make some effort to escape.

When therefore we find (as we do find) the trout lined up under banks and meeting and taking the mature nymph close to the surface quietly and systematically without haste or pursuit, I think we are entitled to infer that the mature nymphs they are taking are, for the moment, practically inert to the extent at any rate of being powerless to resist the current or to make any effort to escape.

In confirmation of this view I may mention that I have watched by the hour the mature nymphs of the Mayfly coming up to hatch and they seemed entirely helpless as they were carried down-stream, neither wriggling nor making any effort to control their progress nor indeed showing any activity until, as they reached the surface, the shucks split down the back and the subimagines started to draw themselves free of them.

So far I have been setting out the conclusions at which

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I had arrived as a result of my personal observations. I do not wish however to be less than entirely candid with my readers—so I feel bound to say that my views as to the inertness of the nymph about to hatch have been challenged by a dry-fly purist on no less an authority than that of my old and good friend, Martin E. Mosely. I therefore wrote to him on the subject, and with his authority I am setting out here verbatim the terms of his reply:

With regard to your question about nymphs: the mode of progress of the ephemerid nymph is by a series of extremely violent undulations of the abdomen which last for a few seconds. This seems to exhaust the insect so that its exertions are followed by a period of a few seconds inertia. When it is thus rested the rapid motion recommences and so on, until it reaches the surface. Here its arrival may coincide with a period of activity or inertness—it's a toss up. But when in the act of emerging the nymph is inert it is not beneath but *on* the surface with the thorax above water, probably at a higher level than that of the spent spinner.

It is incorrect to suppose that the nymph is borne up to the surface by gas. It swims up.

In reply to a further question he added later:

I have personally watched the ephemerid nymphs not only by the river side, but also in my aquarium where I have kept continued observation of nymphs up to and including their emergence on the surface.

This is more than I have had means or opportunity of doing. But his statement as to the activity of the ephemerid nymph does credit it with periods of inertia—and my thirty years' experience of taking good trout with artificial nymphs shows me conclusively that the periods of inertia at and near the surface are sufficiently common to cause trout to line up under banks and in rivers where they may meet and capture the inert nymph with a minimum of trouble. The reason for my insistence on the inertia of the mature nymph is that

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Halford's reason for saying that the trout will not look at the artificial nymph is because of the activity of the natural nymph as contrasted with the deadness of the artificial. There must therefore be many occasions when the natural nymph is so inert as to be well represented by the artificial, since I have for years been finding Halford radically wrong in saying that the trout will not look at the artificial.

This question is debated more at large in the chapter on Halford's pronouncements.

On the question whether the nymph is helped to the surface by distension, whether by gas or otherwise, while giving every weight to Moseley's unique authority I would ask how in the moment of emergence the nymph is *on* the surface with the thorax above water unless there is some distension which, without altering the insect's total weight, reduces its specific gravity and assists flotation. Nothing in nature happens without reason and if the reason in this case be not distension I would respectfully ask what else it can be.

V

RODS AND GEAR

INASMUCH as nymph fishing is only one phase of chalk-stream fishing and can only be pursued with success when the trout are nymphing, and as there are many occasions when the floating fly is the obvious and proper method to use, it is an advantage for the nymph fisher that the rod and line suitable for nymph fishing are suitable for fishing the dry fly. Conversely by no means every rod and line suitable for dry-fly fishing is suitable for fishing the nymph.

To the end of his days the rods and lines used and recommended by Halford for dry-fly fishing were quite unsuited to the delivery to a sitting trout of a nymph or wet fly, so that it would sink immediately on reaching the surface. The stiff rod driving a heavy line through the air was well devised to dry off every particle of moisture from the cast and the fly before the latter reached the fish. The appropriate type of rod for nymph fishing is easy enough in its action to deliver the nymph lightly and accurately, with the main part of the gut cast dry enough to float (oiled, if necessary, for the purpose) but with the nymph still retaining enough of the moisture to sink and carry with it the last two or three feet of fine gut, before it drifts over the trout to which it is cast. The line must not of course be propelled backwards and forwards through the air as it is being let out to reach the trout, but nymph and gut at each forward throw must be allowed to reach and enter the water, so that the nymph and the point are kept

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wet and sink on alighting above the fish. The line, to be suitable for fishing dry fly, wet fly or nymph, according to the conditions of the moment, must be heavy enough to cast when requisite into a moderate wind and to take its part in drying a fly—but not so heavy as to dry the cast too readily.

Assuming the angler to be provided with suitable rod, line and landing-net together with a selection of appropriately dressed nymph patterns and gut casts tapered to 3X or 4X, he is sufficiently equipped for nymph fishing but for one thing. He would be well advised to provide himself with a marrow scoop (see illustration, p. 16) in order to extract the contents of his trouts' stomachs and a metal cup with white-enamel lining into which to wash these contents from the scoop for inspection. For the capture of his first trout he must rely on his judgment of what is being taken, basing his estimate on the type of natural fly which he sees in the air or floating down on the water, or failing that, on one or other of the species in season. Thus he will probably be able to make a pretty good guess and he may hope, with perhaps one or two changes of pattern, to get a trout fairly soon. But having got him and knocked him on the head, he can bring the marrow scoop into play, wetting it, passing it down into the trout's belly and with one twist bringing up the entire contents practically uninjured. These, washed out into the metal cup, should show him exactly what his trout has been taking, and he may select the most likely representation of it from his stock of nymph patterns. The marrow scoop may, if he be a fly dresser, be again brought into play on his return home, to bring out the contents of all his fish and to float them in a suitable dish with a white china bottom, where they can be under his inspection while he dresses

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representations of an exactitude otherwise difficult if not impossible.

Though the marrow scoop is here recommended for chalk-stream fishing it would no doubt be of even greater real service to anglers on other streams and of some service to the dry-fly man on every stream.

I am illustrating at page 16 a marrow scoop for the benefit of those who are unfamiliar with that instrument. Though priceless, it may be obtained in the Jewelry Department of the Army and Navy Stores for a modest 4s. 9d. And a white baby plate (which cost me 2s. at Harrods) is illustrated at page 16 with the contents of a trout's stomach. The plate will be seen to be capable of holding water a good three-quarters of an inch deep and, being heavy and steady, is difficult to upset. Its white bottom shows up through the water every detail of the insect floating in it and assists imitation. I am not suggesting that a baby plate is an essential part of the nymph-fishing fly-dresser's equipment. No doubt a white soup plate or a saucer can be made to serve. But the white baby plate presents the advantages of a sufficient depth of water, a good area of flat bottom, and a steadiness which reduces the danger of slopping over on the fly-dressing table to a minimum—and it can be left for a time without danger.

VI

FISHING THE NYMPH

NYMPH fishing on chalk streams is not, like wet-fly fishing on rough streams, an exclusive or a practically exclusive method. It is a form of trout fishing on chalk streams to be practised only where the behaviour of the trout demands it, just as fishing the floating fly is to be practised where the behaviour of the trout demands it, the two forms providing together a far more comprehensive equipment for the angler than either alone.

But whether the angler be a purist confining himself to the floating fly or a practitioner of both methods as occasion may require, it is equally necessary that he should make such a study of the feeding habits of the fish as will enable him to judge which of the two methods is appropriate to the conditions of the moment, so that he may not be presenting nymphs to a fish which is feeding on super-surface food or pestering with floating patterns fish which are for the time being confining themselves to subaqueous food while letting the floating natural insect go by.

I think it well therefore that I should deal as comprehensively as my experience and equipment will permit me with those indications which the rise-forms made by trout taking insect food of various kinds and in varying conditions present to the angler, as affording clues as to what they are feeding on and how and where.

In an article published in the *Fly Fishers' Club Journal* under the title "Assorted Rises" and republished in 1921 in

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a chapter, also so headed, in *The Way of a Trout with a Fly*, I made what was, I believe, the first serious attempt to help the fly fisher to distinguish from the character of the rise what it is on which the trout is for the time being feeding, and how and where.

In 1925, in *Divers Ways to tackle Trout*, and later in 1929 in *Trout Fishing from All Angles*, Eric Taverner made, under the much happier title "Rise Forms", more extended and detailed examinations of the same phenomena, without however substantially challenging the general basis of the analysis in "Assorted Rises".

As however it is my aim to make this volume comprehensive on its subject I will not refer my readers either to Eric Taverner's work or my own, but I will endeavour to summarise, as clearly and precisely as I can, the conclusions which have so far been reached, but I should like to emphasise here what I pointed out in "Assorted Rises," namely that where the food insect is found by the fish in conditions which render it helpless and unable to make any effort to escape, as in the case of an inert hatching nymph, the trout takes with a gentleness and absence of flurry far different from his action in taking an insect capable of effort to escape.

The insect food of trout (apart from caterpillars, moths, crane-flies, cow-dung and other land flies and ants which wind or rain or accident may precipitate upon the water) comprises:

- (1) Ephemeridae in their successive larval and nymphal stages and in their winged stages as duns or Sub-imagines or as Imagines or Spinners both living and spent, or in some cases crawling under water to lay their eggs.
- (2) Phryganidae or Sedge or Caddis flies in the under-

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water stages when they inhabit cases and crawl on the bottom—stages in which they are of no use to the fly fisher—in the stage in which, leaving the shelter of their cases, they find their way to the surface to hatch out with great suddenness as winged flies and are apt to be attacked by the trout while on their way up—a phase which is seldom of much use to the fly fisher as the hatch is never (except perhaps in the case of a copious hatch of grannom) sufficiently concentrated in one place or line of places to enable the angler by their means to find a trout in position—and in the winged stage when they run on the surface or dance over it in the business of oviposition.

- (3) Perlidae or Stone flies which are not so common on chalk streams as to provide a regular article of diet and are only of use to the angler occasionally—and that not in their under-water or creeper stage, though the representation of the hatched Willow fly in autumn is often best taken as a sunk fly.
- (4) The Alder, which passes its preliminary active stages in the river mud, then crawls ashore to bury itself in the earth for its pupal period and eventually hatches out as a terrestrial fly, seldom seen on the water and even then, on some rivers like the Itchen, seldom taken on the surface—while on other rivers such as the Kennet, the artificial representation well sunk is deadly.
- (5) Gnats in their under-water stages, both larval and pupal and in their winged stage.
- (6) Smuts.
- (7) Water beetles, some of which are subaqueous and others skitter about on the surface, being taken by the trout with a slash.

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So far as these insects are taken on the surface they are matters of dry-fly fishing. So far as they are taken subaqueously they are matters of ordinary wet-fly fishing, but only the larval stages of the *Ephemeridae* are represented in nymph fishing. Fortunately on most chalk streams the nymphs of the *Ephemeridae* constitute the main diet of the trout at such periods as they are feeding at or near the surface. Wet-fly fishing was practised in chalk streams for generations before the dry fly came (and no doubt a proportion of the wet flies presented to the trout were taken for nymphs), but the deliberate practice of seeking to take the trout with a close representation, in size, colour, bulk and outline, of the nymph on which he is for the moment feeding is an innovation of the present century, and still very much misunderstood if one may judge from the monstrosities and absurdities offered and sold by so many of the tackle dealers as nymphs and accepted as such by anglers.

It therefore behoves the angler who would take the best advantage of the new method to watch the behaviour of feeding trout closely, so that he may be able to judge whether feeding fish are in fact nymphing or surface-feeding or are taking subaqueously some other food than nymphs.

In nymph fishing the artificial nymph has to be presented with the maximum of precision to selected individual feeding fish in position, and it should be cast either directly up-stream, up-stream and across, or directly across, or, on occasions even slightly down, with such gentleness and delicacy as to ensure that, without scaring the fish, the artificial nymph and an adequate part of the gut cast shall have sunk before the nymph reaches the fish, but not far enough above him to drag until it is past him.

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The angler should be at pains to study the rise-forms which he finds the trout making and to confine his attention to those which indicate really sizable fish; there need be no occasion for the hooking, injuring and returning of trout too small to be kept. I myself am in favour of a number limit and the return of no caught fish to the water. There is no better method of ensuring that the angler shall leave the small trout alone and devote his attention to those really worth keeping according to the standard of the water, and that too whether his method of fishing be dry or wet or either according to the conditions of the moment.

Apart from having one's artificial nymphs constructed of materials which readily take up water there are several methods of assisting them to sink. The simplest and most obvious is the use of saliva, both on the nymph and on the bottom couple of lengths of the gut cast. That is a process which, especially on a hot dry day, may require frequent renewal. Another method is to apply a little glycerine to the same parts; a third is to anoint the same length of gut or the nymph with a little river mud or with moist clay. Each of these processes may require renewal from time to time. These observations apply equally whether the trout cast to be tailing, bulging or taking the natural nymph quietly near the surface without pursuit on the trout's part or effort to escape on the part of the nymph.

The opportunities afforded by tailing fish are few. Those afforded by bulging trout are more frequent, but still only occasional. I have already described what is meant by "bulging". It is hard to say what are the conditions which cause the trout to bulge. A fit of bulging is often accompanied by a relatively tiny hatch of fly, and it may be that the nymphs, for some obscure motive (perhaps migration to another pasture), come out of their fastnesses for a spell

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and return (in greatly reduced numbers) to their fastnesses in the same or another bed of weeds.

Fishing with nymph to bulging fish, unless one casts to them up-stream or up and across, is much more apt to lead to fishing down with a dragging fly than any other form of nymph fishing. Indeed that method was expressly recommended by Dr J. C. Mottram in his *Fly Fishing: Some New Arts and Mysteries*. And it may be that a revulsion from such methods (I cannot commend them) has of late driven Dr Mottram back into the ranks of the dry-fly purists. The dragging method *is*, of course, apt to lead to the hooking and mishandling of undersized fish, and is therefore rightly objected to.

The drawback in casting to bulging trout, whether with dry fly, wet fly or nymph, is that the place where the bulge last occurred is almost invariably the place where the trout is *not* a moment later, and I have already deprecated the method of getting over this difficulty by casting a dragging wet fly or nymph across the weed-bed where bulging trout are feeding. Bulging trout are not easily scared by being cast over, and anyhow an up-stream cast can be withdrawn, if it fails, without any disturbance of the water; and the sway of the weeds may impart enough motion to the natural nymph to attract the trout.

The type of nymph to be offered to bulgers may be the same as might at the same season be offered to a trout quietly nymphing under a bank, but one of the Tup's Indispensable type specially dressed to sink is often very effective.

Beyond question therefore the angler's best chance with a nymphing fish is with one which is taking nymph quietly and without haste or pursuit either under a bank or in a run or at the tail of a good nymph-holding type of weed.

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Such trout do not move about much, often continue nymphing for a considerable time, and thus can be cast to with greater precision than any others.

In this condition it is obvious that for the artificial nymph to approach the trout like a natural mature nymph it must be fished so as to reach the trout without drag, for, as I have shown, the mature natural nymph, being inert, must come to the fish with the current and without drag.

Occasionally one may see quite good trout in the middle of a strong stream, seldom breaking the surface, but moving slightly to and fro, pale *café-au-lait* coloured shadows intercepting under water the natural nymphs coming down on the strength of the current. These are usually lusty and powerful fish.

When trout are feeding steadily under water and are letting the winged fly go over them unmarked it is usually because there is a strong and steady stream of nymphs being brought to them by the current. And so long as that stream of nymphs offers steadier and more profitable feeding than the floating dun so long will the trout continue to take the nymph and let the fly go by. I have however observed occasions when the wind, driving the hatched-out flies under one bank, has so concentrated them that the stream of hatched-out flies outnumber the nymphs and the trout soon begin to take the floating fly. I have indeed on more than one occasion found trout nymphing under one length of bank and neglecting the hatched-out fly, while just round a bend where the wind concentrated the hatched fly under the bank the fish were busy with them there.

Where however the hatch has practically ceased, any trout which remains in position has his attention no longer concentrated on a stream of nymphs or flies, and, if still unsatisfied and rising, is sometimes ready to take whichever

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comes along, and this is why a casual feeder who goes on after the main hatch is over is generally a comparatively easy fish. A small Red Sedge, a Pheasant Tail, a Tup's Indispensable, floating to represent a spinner or sunk to represent a nymph, may equally well do his business, for he has no longer a stream of natural insects with which to compare them. I have latterly wondered at times whether the explanation of the trout taking under-water winged wet flies that in shape do not resemble nymphs but upwinged duns or sedges, may not be that they see approaching them not only the artificial sunk fly but also its reflection in the mirror which the underside of the surface film provides outside the trout's window. The fish thus sees two forms approaching him, one, the real, under water, and the other, the reflection, just as he sees the nymph, and feels that he must take the subaqueous fly in the same way as he takes the nymph. It seems a thin explanation, reflecting little credit on the trout's intelligence—but I have been unable to think of a better.

When trout and/or grayling are seen rising at something invisible and perhaps not quite breaking the surface, while letting upwinged duns go by, it is often difficult to judge whether they are taking nymphs or spent spinners. In each case they suck in something that is not an insect floating above the surface, but is either a spinner floating spent, and perhaps semi-submerged, a midge or a nymph just arriving at the surface and about to hatch out into a dun. When the rise is taking place under the angler's own bank, it is often possible to find out the fact by watching and observing what food the current brings. But when the rise is in the middle or under the far bank the problem is not so easy.

The late Colonel E. W. Harding in his invaluable volume,

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The Flyfisher and the Trout's Point of View, shows how the trout lying in wait with an upward gaze below a smooth surface is enabled to watch the reflection of the approaching nymph in the mirror made by the surface beyond the window through which he can see—and how, in order to keep the reflection in view of his upward gaze, he has to come up to the surface to meet the actual nymph as it and its reflection come together there. Thus his rise to a nymph under such conditions and to a spent spinner both culminate at the surface and bear a close resemblance to one another, a resemblance accentuated by the fact that neither inert nymph nor spent spinner can make any effort to escape.

There are however clues which may be of assistance to the angler in determining whether the quarry be spent spinner or nymph. Upwinged duns and spinners that are not spent are generally driven by the wind, even if it be no more than a light air, under one bank or another. Spent spinners however fall all over the water and go down spent where they fall instead of being wind-driven under either bank; and often where there is a heavy spinner fall in the middle of the river trout will be roaming in mid-stream to meet them. This is particularly noticeable of an evening, when trout rising under either bank may in general be suspected of feeding either on duns or nymphs. In places however where the strength of the stream is in the middle the trout may still be taking nymphs and not spinners, and it is difficult to tell which. Where however one finds trout rising to something invisible below collections of weed either growing from the bottom and rising above the surface or cut and collected against the bank, so that the surface of the current is obstructed and neither upwinged dun nor spinner can be brought to the fish, the inference that the trout is taking nymphs is irresistible.

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I had instances of these conditions recently on the Itchen. On the first occasion, late in June, a trout was rising steadily but infrequently under the far bank in quite smooth water behind a patch of weeds floating on the surface where it was impossible for any upwinged dun or any spinner, living or spent, to reach him. The conclusion therefore was that he must be taking nymphs emerging from the weed bed and about to hatch. The trout took my artificial nymph the first time it reached him, and proved to be $2\frac{1}{4}$ lb.—a good fish for the Itchen.

On the second occasion the trout was rising under similar conditions behind a patch of cut weed lodged on a bed of weed under the far bank, and, taking my nymph at the first offer, proved to be 3 lb. 14 oz. Both of these fish had only nymphs in their crops. They are instances also to show how mistaken Halford was in his pronouncement that the wet fly was useless in conditions of bright sun and smooth surface, and that only small fish can be caught with it.

Another pointer for the angler is the rate at which the trout is taking. If he be rising frequently, it is much easier to judge whether he be taking nymph or spent spinner—whether he be rising under a bank or out in the open stream, unless the weather be quite still and a heavy fall of spent spinner has been observed. In that case spinner may be inferred.

In some conditions of light it is possible to detect trout lying under a further bank, not breaking the surface at all since the rise has not got into full swing but obviously lying in wait. Then an appropriate nymph dropped a yard or so above them will often bring them out a few inches, and if one tightens as the trout's head turns back to the bank the hook is usually found to have gone home.

When a fish is rising in mid-stream and cruising, he may

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be taking spent spinner or nymph, but a rise to spent spinner is often distinguished by a head and tail action, elsewhere described as "the porpoise roll". But here again the frequency or infrequency of the rise may afford a useful indication of what the trout is really doing. Nymphs in a strong current are generally more frequent than spent spinners and are moreover more readily perceived by the trout even at a little distance and a proportion of them are taken well below the surface.

I have already pointed out that in presenting an artificial nymph to a trout in position it is essential that not only should it sink on alighting, but that it should draw with it two feet or more of the cast, otherwise a fatal drag may occur. The nymph should be dressed with a short soft hackle and of material to take up water and the line should not be dried by successive casts in the air—but at each cast in letting out line to reach the fish the nymph and gut should come down on the water so that in the final cast which reaches the trout the last two feet or more of the gut shall be wet. If the wind will serve across stream a switch cast may well be adopted and in subsequent casts the manœuvre known as "picking it off" (p. 183 of *The Way of a Trout*) enables the nymph to be delivered in the right state of moisture. This operation is carried out as follows: Assuming that you are on the right bank of the stream with the flow from left to right and that you have laid your cast across and desire to pick it up for a fresh cast. You move your rod-top briskly out to the right and then up and round in a rapid forward curve to the left. This picks up the heaviest part of the line and, bellying it in a long single curve, lifts it into the air, leaving little but the gut on the water, whence it should be picked off for the back cast before any part of the line has time to fall back into the water. This puts the

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minimum of strain on the rod, and in the forward cast the nymph and the fine end of the gut are delivered with the least possible amount of drying to the fish. The method can easily be learnt. The part of the gut intended to float may be greased or oiled.

I am not suggesting that it is only at the surface that trout take the inert nymphs on their way up to hatch, for every now and then a deeper swirl or a mere hump on the water tells one that a trout has met and absorbed a nymph at a lower level. And indeed, were it otherwise, it would be a poor look-out for the nymph angler, for most of his fish must take his artificial nymph below the surface, from 1 inch or less to perhaps 5 or 6 inches. The shape, size and energy of the rise form do however give the nymph angler useful means of judging whether the riser be a sizable or big fish or one which it is his business, as a good sportsman, to avoid. A nymphing fish should not, any more than should a trout taking the floating natural fly, be cast to until the angler has fairly judged him to be at least sizable according to the standard of the water. If care be taken in this respect the angler is no more likely to hook unsizable fish with nymph than with a floating fly.

Though in general the angler will find his best profit in presenting his artificial nymph as if it were a natural nymph on its way to hatch, yet there are occasions when the trout may be found taking the active nymph. Of these occasions the more important occurs after weed cutting when the growing nymph, feeling the vegetation which was his habitat no longer fixed to the soil, but cut adrift, is apt to seek temporary refuge out of the current in little bays under the bank. Here the trout finds him out, and here at times an artificial nymph of appropriate size and colour cast into the bay, and dragged out by the force of the current on the

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line, is apt to attract the attention of the trout and to be followed and taken with a plunge. Trout taken thus are generally big. I recall an occasion when from the far bank I saw four trout busy in such a tiny backwater about a yard wide, and, offering a nymph, I succeeded in hooking all four of them in succession and landing three.

Sometimes it will happen that an artificial nymph sent to a trout rising quietly under the bank or in a run will be taken so close to the surface and as obviously as a dry fly would be. Sometimes the trout may even be seen to turn at the nymph. Then there is no difficulty about striking. But oftener the signs of a trout's acceptance of the nymph are far subtler and less obvious and may at times be so slight that the angler who has responded to one or other of them and hooked his trout may be unable to say precisely why he struck. The more obvious signs may be described as follows:

The first I may call "the draw" which may occur in several different conditions according to whether the nymph has been delivered in fast water or in slow, directly upstream or up and across, directly across or across and slightly down. The feature of the draw is the sudden acceleration of the pace of sinking of the fine end of the cast with its attached nymph. The response to this signal must be immediate or the fish will be gone.

Too frequently however conditions of light prevent the angler from detecting the draw. He may however sometimes discern some subtle shift of colour or movement of the water caused by the fish turning to take the nymph.

At times when, casting directly up-stream over deepish water one detects a dim fawn-coloured shadow busy intercepting nymphs and seldom breaking the surface, then even if one does not see the draw one may infer the taking by

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observing the fawn brown shadow move to the spot where one infers one's nymph to be and then turn back into the straight—and then the response may be rewarded by a tight line. But even if it be not, the recovery of line and nymph under water is less apt to alarm the feeding fish than would a futile strike at a rise to a floating fly.

Sometimes the taking will be indicated by a slight humping of the surface looking like a soup plate upside down with a pinhole in the middle or a crinkle coming to the surface. Practice and close attention may in time develop in the chalk stream nymph-fisher a sort of instinct akin to that of the first-rate up-stream wet-fly fisher on rough rivers. The latter however have the advantage, not available to the chalk stream angler, of fishing with a tight line, so that he is always in touch with his fly—with the result that a taking trout is apt to hook himself.

Sometimes a fish will be found nymphing in mid-stream. This may take place in a run where the trout feeds in position, much as he does under a bank, and he must generally be fished to up and more or less across. Or he may be cruising over a greater or less area of open flat water. If he can be seen he can be cast to with a fair chance of success provided the angler keep low. If however, as is generally the case, he cannot be seen, the chances of lining him or putting him down are greatly increased, and it is seldom of any use to cast to a cruiser at the place of the last rise, as he has almost always moved on. The most frequent case of cruising trout taking nymphs is of an evening during a strong rise of the blue-winged olive.

A strong adverse breeze into which the nymph and gut cast have to be forced is inimical to nymph-fishing, because the force used in casting into it tends to dry both gut and nymph—and drag may result from the gut and nymph as

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fatal to the capture of the trout as the drag of a fully floating fly. Such a breeze moreover generally creates a ruffle which prevents the fish from seeing the approaching nymph reflected in the surface mirror. It will as a rule be found therefore that a ruffle due to breeze, whether adverse or not, is not conducive to trout in position taking the nymph under the ruffled surface so as to be detected by the angler. When in such circumstances trout are found nymphing it is more frequently than not in smooth unruffled water; and if the fish can be approached with the wind, whether from directly below, or across and up, straight across, or across and slightly down, the nymph can best be delivered so as to sink immediately and to reach the fish in the best position to be taken.

It should be noted that a nymph cast directly up-stream is apt to sink more rapidly than one cast across. It is best therefore in such conditions not to cast too far above the trout and to let the line fall to the left or right of him rather than directly over. The nearer one's nymph is to the surface the easier it is to detect the rise, while a cast not too far to one side or the other of him may bring the fish across to the nymph, perhaps in sight of the angler, and is less likely to line the trout than one made directly over him. The direction of the light too should be watched and the nymph preferably placed to the side in shade of the bank. These considerations also apply to a casting across stream.

If the nymph be cast directly up-stream, drag is not much to be feared, but if across care should be taken so to handle the line that the nymph does not begin to drag out until it has passed the trout. Here the reader will realise why I have been elsewhere so insistent on the inertness of the natural nymph on its way to hatch. It may be that where a lure-type of so-called nymph is used, it is more effective dragging

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than following the course of the current. But where the nymph pattern is a good representation of the natural insect it is more likely to be taken if it follows the course of the natural nymph and is brought down in the same line by the current. It would follow as a matter of course that, if not allowed to drag till it is past the fish, a nymph cast across, even if slightly down, is less likely to alarm the trout by lining him than if cast straight up-stream to him. A nymph approaching has not to be seen by the fish through his window, but can be seen either by reflection in the mirror or by direct vision even a yard or so away, and if it be the right pattern and attractive the trout is not unlikely to sail over to it and take it. Sometimes the entire operation can be seen by the angler, and a strike, delivered as the fish turns back to resume his post, results in a firmly hooked trout.

I deal elsewhere with the type of pattern which most fairly represents the natural nymph. I am as firmly set against the use of fancy patterns and lures under the name of nymphs as was Halford in his later days against fancy floating flies, and I strongly urge the use of the best representation which the angler can dress or procure, resembling, when wet, the natural nymph in size, colour and form.

It may be noted that the most favourable conditions for finding trout feeding quietly on the rising nymph are where the current sets strongly under the bank and the surface is unruffled, for in these conditions trout can make best use of the surface mirror.

Where, on the other hand, the surface is ruffled, particularly by wind, the surface of the mirror is broken and obscured and trout must either be reduced to meeting the nymph well below the surface, or seeking his prey elsewhere.

This reasoning no doubt accounts for the fact, which in

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my youth puzzled me sorely, that in rough North Country and Scottish streams it is the rarest thing to see the surface broken by a rising trout. The mirror in these cases is almost, if not entirely, useless to the fish, which must therefore catch his prey in mid-water. In such waters "the time of the take", as it is called, depends on the hour when the nymph is on its way to hatch, but the rough-water angler is in general deprived of the evidence of the break of the surface which tells the smooth-water angler not only where to find the fish but when it is on the feed.

The rough-stream angler therefore has to fish with a line so tight as to render it probable that a taking trout will hook himself and the broken nature of the current no doubt accustoms the fish to all sorts of vagaries of drag.

Both the spent spinner and the nymph taken in a "dimpling" rise are absorbed with a definite suck. The head and tail rise or porpoise roll in general suggest spinner, though I have known occasions when the nymph has been taken with a head and tail rise, particularly in quiet bays out of the current. This always seems to me to indicate that the fish are quietly taking something which has little or no chance of escape, into the air, or otherwise. Anyhow, it sometimes makes it very difficult for the angler to determine what the particular quarry is. Spinner-fall often precedes the general rise in the morning. Later on in the morning and through the day the sucking rise suggests nymph. But in the early evening, especially when it occurs in midstream, spinner is generally, but not always, a better bet than nymph.

I do want to insist again, as I did concerning the wet fly in *Minor Tactics of the Chalk Stream*, that I am firmly against fishing the water in any form—and I agree fully with those who claim that that kind of practice and fishing

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a dragging fly down-stream *is* detrimental, that it leads to hacking or injuring or pricking and searing unsizable fish, and that the only legitimate method of nymph fishing and the true sporting method is to cast to the individual selected subaqueously feeding fish.

MAYFLY NYMPHS

The Mayfly has long ceased to exist on my length of the Itchen and it is long since I fished Mayfly anywhere. But on those occasions when I found trout taking the Mayfly nymph they seemed to snatch it, as if afraid of it, and to dash off with such speed that, by the time the boil of their turn reached the surface, they were yards away. In fact they were bulging. I never saw them taking Mayfly nymphs at the surface calmly and gently as they take the nymphs of the smaller Ephemeroptera. So far as I know therefore the methods of nymph fishing applicable to the smaller Ephemeropterae are not suitable to fishing the nymph of the Mayfly. The only occasion when I have heard anything to the contrary was when a friend of mine, an excellent angler, visited during the Mayfly season a big house on the Kennet as one of a week-end party of four or five, and having dressed some imitations of the Mayfly nymph, took with them during his stay, not only more trout than any other member of the party, but more daily and in the aggregate than all the others put together. But I do not know how he fished his artificial nymph.

VII

EXCEPTIONS

I DO not wish to be less than entirely candid with my readers and I therefore feel bound to mention that there are three upwinged floating fly patterns which will on occasion attract a nymph-taking trout to the surface.

The first is the Gold-ribbed Hare's Ear, a pattern extolled by F. M. Halford in his earlier books and later on abandoned. He claimed that it would take trout throughout the season. My own experience is that it is specially successful in the season of the large Medium Olive Dun of spring. There is little doubt that this pattern must be taken for a hatching nymph standing on its partially discarded shuck. Indeed this was substantially Halford's own opinion.

Another gold-ribbed pattern which I have found specially attractive to tailing trout (which are of course often nymphing) is Pope's Green Nondescript—the invention of Mr W. H. Pope—which the late George Holland used to dress beautifully and correctly, but which is now practically unobtainable, as none of the dressers seem to use the right coloured bright but palish-green floss for the body.

The third is the Red Quill with a ribbed body of strapped *undyed* peacock herl and a sharp, bright red cock's hackle. The reason why this is occasionally taken by nymphing fish I have never been able to fathom.

Apart from these three patterns I know of none which attract the nymphing trout. I have long discarded both

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Wickham's Fancy and the Pink Wickham, with the latter of which I had some success with tailing trout.

The Gold-ribbed Hare's Ear appears to me to be a fair fly to use as it suggests something definite which the trout may be taking. The attraction of Pope's Green Nondescript I confess myself unable to explain—the Red Quill *may* be taken for a spinner which a trout taking nymphs as they arrive at the surface might be occasionally tempted to accept—but this is a mere guess.

It is observable that where the water runs fast, as in places where it is let out through a hatch to irrigate meadows, though the fish are no doubt taking their quota of nymphs, they are far more amenable to the attraction of a floating fly such as a Red Sedge on a No. 2 hook or a seal's fur-bodied claret spinner of similar size than in the more regular flow of the main stream—and this is probably to some extent true of the main stream where it is shallow and flows fast with a broken surface over and between weeds.

VIII

PERSONAL

THE history of my personal connection with the subject of this volume has been one of slow development.

After a couple of ineffective seasons (1875-1876) on the Old Barge river at Winchester while a boy at the school, with an impossible rod and line and with flies supposed to be fished dry but in build best suited to be fished downstream wet, and some odd days on the Thames and Colne with dace and chub, and on the Tweed and South Esk with trout, I had the fortune in 1883 to be invited by the late Irwin E. B. Cox (then one of the proprietors of the *Field*) to fish the length of the Itchen he had recently rented, and there I met Francis Francis, who was then Angling Editor of the *Field*, and William Senior who succeeded him. The beautifully tied split-winged floaters which I saw at the Fisheries Exhibition of that year, so much better than the flies I had hitherto used, and the charm of the Itchen with its store of free-rising trout, and the success of Francis Francis in taking a leash of 2-pounders on my first day, inspired in me an enthusiasm for the floating fly which was clinched when, in 1887, I was presented with Halford's *Floating Flies and how to Dress Them*. In the latter part of that year I took up trout-fly dressing with enthusiasm and I read in the British Museum and elsewhere every book I could find on the subject and analysed and recorded the dressings.

My days on the Itchen became yearly more frequent, and

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I had more wet-fly fishing on the Tweed and South Esk, and in 1888 I had a week or so on the Coquet in September. I recall that about that year I suggested to George Holland, the well-known professional fly dresser with whom I got into correspondence, that he should dress a trout fly with a piece of sponge for body material to make it sink. About the same time a friend gave me the 1883 edition of Cutcliffe's *Trout Fishing in Rapid Streams*. It was about then I got into correspondence through the *Fishing Gazette* with the late R. S. Austin—not realising for a long time that he was not an amateur.

In 1889 I became the happy owner of Halford's *Dry Fly Fishing in Theory and Practice* which became to me, as to many others, a sort of gospel.

Mr Cox continued to give me more and more days on the Itchen. From the first I was rising and hooking trout, but I foolishly used gossamer gut and I left an undue proportion of my flies in the fish in the strike. One Saturday I was fishing at a spot where a strong stream emerged from a hatch and I left my fly (a Pink Wickham) and two lengths of gut point in a fish. Next Monday, fishing at the same place with another Pink Wickham, I caught and killed the same fish with the fly in his mouth and half a yard or more of gut attached, and in recovering the fly I found his mouth was full of small bright green nymphs. This was my first observation of the kind and my first realisation that trout did not feed exclusively on the winged fly—though I had been struck by a mocking remark of a correspondent of the *Fishing Gazette* to the effect that anglers were foolish if they supposed that flies were what trout fed on. It looks as if he had not realised that the nymph was the fly in an earlier stage.

On Mr Cox's Itchen water I used to meet an old retired

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solicitor named Godwin who used a long soft rod 13 or 14 feet long and fished a wet fly with a good entry down-stream, or across and down (just in fact the type of fly supplied to me as a boy by old John Hammond for use on the Old Barge length of the Itchen)—and he explained to me how trout were caught before the advent of the dry fly by fishing a wet fly down-stream over the tails of weed beds. But I did not realise, nor I believe did he, that his flies thus fished were taken for swimming nymphs.

There were, however, two nephews of Mr Cox who on rough days of down-stream wind would fish the Itchen down-stream with two or three biggish flies and caught big baskets, mainly of small trout, but as a disciple of Halford I felt no disposition to follow their example. I had meanwhile some further wet-fly experience on the Yore, and I grew more and more puzzled to understand why the dry fly should be exclusively used on chalk streams, when before its advent big baskets were caught with the wet fly.

In September 1891 I met F. M. Halford on the Abbots' Barton water and had a week's fishing with him; and in the evenings I used, with a number of others, to visit him in his room at the George Hotel and listen (with becoming reverence) to him while he held forth on the dry fly. Two years later, on the sponsorship of Halford and William Senior, I became a member of the Fly Fishers' Club and took a keen and active part in its doings.

Trout frequently bulged on the Itchen and I could not for the life of me see why they should be fished with dry flies when they were obviously feeding under water. I guessed from my wet-fly experience on other rivers that some flies such as were effective on the Tweed and elsewhere might be effective with Itchen bulger. So I began to experiment on the bulgers with small double-hooked

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Greenwell's Glories such as Mr Ewen M. Tod recommended for his Scotch waters and with occasional success.

From that I took to trying the same pattern and later other wet flies on trout which, though rising in position under the banks, could not be seen to take floating sub-imagines,^{*} still being puzzled to discern the reason why trout took winged patterns under water—but more and more certain that there must be some good reason in nature for their doing so. In 1899 the *Field* published a letter from me in which I stated my conviction that anglers on chalk streams would have to go back to the wet fly on occasions where trout were not surface feeding. This letter was recalled to my memory by my late friend, H. T. Sheringham (then Angling Editor of the *Field*), a short time before his death, and it was reprinted for historical reasons at pages 59 and 60 of my third volume, *Side Lines, Side Lights and Reflections*.

I began to make an occasional autopsy, finding the fish generally full of nymph, with few winged flies or none, and I gradually extended my practice of using the wet fly on occasions when the dry fly failed or was obviously not being taken. I also had had in the 'nineties some dry-fly experience on the Derbyshire Derwent, Wye and Manifold, besides having several Mayfly seasons on the Lower Kennet where there were plenty of big chub and the few trout I caught averaged about 3 lb.

In 1899 I visited a limestone river in Bavaria, very like a chalk stream in character, and for a number of years thereafter up to 1909 I fished it pretty regularly—finding, to my surprise, that a large sunk Alder was very successful, and that small wet flies often did better than small floaters. This, however, was not the case with big sedges.

I am omitting reference to other rivers, including Nor-

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wegan and Bosnian streams, which had little or no bearing on my progress towards nymph fishing in chalk streams.

I had for several years carried on a lengthy correspondence on fly dressing and fly fishing with Mr R. S. Austin and in 1900 he communicated to me his discovery of the since famous trout-fly pattern to which I gave the name "Tup's Indispensable". I thought at first it was (as he intended it to be) merely a red spinner and as such I soon found it more successful semi-submerged than floating. Later I discovered that, dressed with less red seal's fur mixed in the dubbing, it was by no means a bad representation of one of the nymphs which looks as if it were bleeding at the thorax. It led to my dressing for myself and using a small range of nymphs, including one of the Blue-winged Olive for use in the day-time.

In the 'nineties too I became acquainted with and warmly attached to the late Louis Bouglé, and fished with him on two or three Normandy chalk streams and was strongly encouraged by him to pursue my enquiries and experiments in the use of the wet fly on clear weedy rivers.

In 1902, being greatly impressed with the powers and quality of the American light trout fly rod, particularly the Leonard make, I flung myself actively into the controversy on the subject which raged in the angling press. The part which I took led to my making the acquaintance of the late Walter Durfee Coggeshall—an American long resident in London—and to my acquisition in 1903 of my first Leonard, a 10-footer. In 1905 a client presented me with "the best fly-rod money could buy", to be chosen by myself—and having been immensely struck by the quality of a 9-foot Leonard brought over in 1904 for the Crystal Palace Fly Casting Tournament by young Mr Mills of New York (whose firm built and sold the Leonard rods), I selected a

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duplicate which is still, after thirty-three years' hard wear, the joy of my life. It formed a strong contrast to the stiff and heavy weaver's beams which were the dry-fly rods in fashion in that day. It enabled me to cast a fly to sink on alighting, and I have no doubt it had a great effect in helping me with my experiments in wet-fly fishing with fly and nymph to individual trout in chalk streams. I discarded my Perfection 10-footer, my 11-foot Test Rod and another wrist-breaker.

By the end of 1909 the late H. T. Sheringham induced me to throw together a series of articles which I had contributed to the *Field*, the *Fishing Gazette* and the *Fly Fishers' Club Journal*, and to add some matter to link them up. The collection was illustrated by a number of my wet-fly patterns, including Tup's Indispensable and one olive nymph. It was called *Minor Tactics of the Chalk Stream*, and, advocating as it did the use of wet flies when trout were not taking floaters, it produced a certain sensation in the angling world. But though I believe I was regarded by some of the ultra dry-fly group as an exceedingly wicked man—a veritable lost soul—the storm of controversy which I had anticipated never materialised and the argument implicit in my volume evoked no solitary attempt to answer it. Still I was profoundly dissatisfied with my failure to account for trout taking the winged fly under water—a point on which my friend Bouglé commented with kindly humour.

In the next ten years or so I continued assiduously to practise the use of wet fly and nymph for trout which were neglecting the floating natural fly, and I contributed to the *Field* and the *Fly Fishers' Club Journal* during that period a number of articles, in which I discussed the eyesight of the trout and his other faculties and, collaterally, a number of papers of a type similar to those contained in *Minor*

Tactics of the Chalk Stream; and these were collected and published in 1921 under the title, *The Way of a Trout with a Fly*. This volume contained a description of two new methods of imitating the nymph more precisely than that illustrated in my previous volume.

Still I was not satisfied; and, having borrowed the family marrow scoop, I found it capable of extracting, with a single twist, the entire contents of the stomach of a trout. Soon afterwards I supplanted the cup or saucer into which I had washed out the contents of the marrow scoop by one of those heavy china plates with a strong incurved rim, made to prevent babies from spooning their food over the edge of the plate. And I found that in such a baby plate I could have the entire contents of a trout's stomach floating before me so that I could simulate the nymphs not only as to colour but as to length, taper, thickness and other detail with a precision previously impossible—and all this without any of the nauseating mess of an autopsy. So I set to work dressing a series of nymphs and testing them again and again on the trout, and with such success that I felt fully justified in having thrown off the shackles of the exclusive dry-fly doctrines of Halford and his school and in continuing to practise the presentation to feeding trout of wet fly and nymph, especially the nymph, *when they were feeding below the surface*. In the old days of the dry fly a 2-pounder was a rarity—I now began to get them fairly frequently and even an occasional 3-pounder.

Latterly too I found an increasing disposition on the part of chalk stream anglers to regard the use of the artificial nymph when trout were nymphing as a valuable addition to their technique—but at the same time a lamentable inability on the part of most tackle dealers to supply patterns having a real resemblance to any natural nymph. And I

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was assured not long ago by a distinguished Test angler that the Test was being fished with nymphs from Overton to the sea.

In another part of this volume I examine the teachings and claims of Halford and endeavour to show where he went wrong, and how but for some ineffective observation on his part he might have been of my opinion and have preached a very different doctrine.

I have turned back to *Minor Tactics of the Chalk Stream* (1910) and to *The Way of a Trout with a Fly* (1921) to verify my recollections of my earlier experiments with nymphs—and I find from the latter (published in 1921 but mainly written earlier), p. 123, that I had used imitations of nymphs on chalk streams for some fifteen seasons, and later in the same page I wrote:

I can cordially concur in the oft-expressed wish that some wet-fly enthusiast would set to work and make exact reproductions of nymphs and larvae in the same way as Mr F. M. Halford treated the floating fly. And these should be submitted to searching tests not only by one angler, but by a large number of skilled men.

When that was penned I had not discovered the marrow scoop or the baby plate.

Naturally, some of my efforts to represent the nymph have been less successful than others. And though later in this volume I give particulars of the more successful dressings, I would warn my readers that patterns which are effective on Itchen and Test are not necessarily effective on other streams. Nor, indeed, is a pattern which killed yesterday necessarily effective on the same river to-day, when quite probably other species of flies are hatching or by their preponderance are exacting more of the trout's attention.

The Usk is a river on which the practice of nymph fishing has made great progress—but the range of natural

IX

REACTION

IN the last year or so I have, somewhat to my surprise, seen signs of a movement on the part of some chalk stream anglers to try to re-rivet upon their brethren the fetters of the exclusive dry fly, from which I had hoped that time, experience and common sense had enabled anglers to shake themselves free. But whenever I have come across anglers who wish to re-establish the exclusive dominance of the dry fly, I have almost invariably found that they ranged themselves under one or more of the following heads:

- (1) Men who do not understand and will not take the trouble to learn the art of fishing the nymph.
- (2) Men who find the whole fascination of chalk stream fishing in seeing the fly taken on the surface—a good enough reason for their own practice, but none for intolerance nor for restricting the practice of anglers who find an even subtler charm in taking sub-aqueously trout which, while feeding at or near the surface, are not taking the floating natural insect.
- (3) Men who suppose it to be a “chuck and chance it” method of fishing the water. These are radically and ignorantly wrong, for it is nothing of the sort.
- (4) Men who think it an unduly deadly method. It is too difficult an art to be that, even if the charge were true. After all, the dry fly came in as an improved and more deadly method, enabling the angler to

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catch trout untakable in light or calm weather by the wet fly as then understood. Why then should an art which gives the angler a chance of taking trout for the time being untakable by the dry fly be barred?

(5) Finally (and these are the great majority), men who do not know what a nymph is like and assume that the objects commonly sold by tackle dealers as such—most of which bear no resemblance to the real insect and have whatever success they obtain simply as lures, illegitimate on chalk streams—are what is meant by nymphs. This class are justified in their objection to the use of such objects under the name of nymph or any other name, but are not justified in objecting to the use of proper representations of the natural nymph.

I cannot believe that this reaction will succeed. It is suggested that fishing the nymph is an easier matter than fishing the dry fly—but all that this boils down to is that drag makes the dry fly difficult and that the nymphs, it is said, may drag without scaring the trout. But this is all: and it is not wholly true; while the special difficulties attending fishing the nymph which are absent from dry-fly practice are ignored. It comes to this, that the dry-fly purist seeks to impose on the angler either abstention from fishing to a rising fish which is nymphing, or else the obligation of persecuting him with the futility of a floating fly while he is confining himself to subaqueous food.

Though it is claimed by those in the movement that the floating fly is the more difficult method, I can only say, speaking for myself, that if I see the trout taking the surface fly I should offer them a floater as being the easier and the obviously correct course. But I decline to be coerced into

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fishing floaters to trout which are consistently nymphing or, alternatively, into abstaining from fishing them until they have come on to surface food, which may not happen at all in the course of my day or week-end.

It is further suggested that the effect of fishing the nymph is to drive the trout to feeding deep. In my opinion this is unmitigated nonsense. On the chalk stream with which I am most familiar (having fished it from 1883 onward) the years during which I have been fishing the under-water fly and the nymph have been marked by a progressive disposition on the part of the trout to feed on nymphs just below the surface and to ignore the surface fly. It would be equally logical to say that nymph fishing would tend to drive fish to the floating fly. Before the advent of the dry fly all trout fishing with the fly, on chalk streams as well as elsewhere, was subaqueous—but the trout have never been driven to feed deep, as it is suggested they would be. *The Diary of a Test Fisherman*, covering the years 1809 to 1819, shows clearly that the writer, the Rev. Richard Durnford, knew well that his Test and Anton trout were often feeding subaqueously; and he had wonderful baskets.

Dr Mottram, once an advocate of the nymph, but in his later days a protagonist of the attack on nymph fishing, cannot put his case higher than that nymph fishing on streams where the trout can be easily caught *out* with the dry fly alone, ought not to be allowed. On such streams, who would want to fish the nymph at times when the simpler and more obvious method of the floating fly is available?

X

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THOUGH I believe that the movement to reassert the exclusive dominance of the dry fly on chalk streams is largely due to the use by some anglers of the illegitimate lures sold as nymphs by many tackle dealers and ignorantly accepted as such by their customers, yet that is not the case put forward by the purists. The arguments adduced are based upon F. M. Halford, and I do not think therefore that the case for the nymph can be said to have been conclusively dealt with without an examination of the pronouncements thereon of Halford as its main and most authoritative opponent, both in his earlier work and also in his later works, when his doctrine had become less liberal and more and more pronouncedly purist. I am therefore inflicting on the reader a somewhat prolonged analysis of Halford's writings on this subject which I beg him not to skip, as it is vital to a correct understanding of how he came to assume his intolerant attitude on the question of fishing wet fly and nymph on chalk streams.

It is nothing but justice to say of Halford that the governing spirit of his purist doctrine was unselfishness, the desire to be fair at once to his brother angler and to the trout; and it is without any thought of imputing to him any less magnanimous motive that I feel bound to examine his pronouncements closely and to demonstrate how his failure to realise certain essential features of the situation led him, by the very fact of his magnanimity,

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to enunciate doctrines which experience has shown to be unsound.

I have already said that I have no quarrel whatever—on the contrary, I am in agreement with his objection to chalk stream anglers “fishing the water”, searching it with a wet fly or a team of wet flies, thus catching or pricking and scaring unsizable fish, and incidentally covering as much water as would be enough for several anglers casting fly, dry or wet, or artificial nymph to individual selected feeding fish in position. But from first to last Halford never seems to have understood or believed that it was possible to direct the wet fly (or nymph) successfully to such fish when feeding subaqueously with as much precision and with as much care for the feelings and interests of the brother angler and as much consideration for unsizable fish as is displayed by the most careful purist fishing the dry fly to surface feeders. He expressed his incredulity in very definite terms at page 75 of his last work, *The Dry Fly Man's Handbook* (1913), in which he came down hard in favour of strict purism. He says:

I am told that there is a school of fly fishermen who only fish the sunk fly over a feeding fish or one in position if it will not take a floating fly. This, they urge, is a third method of wet-fly fishing, the other two being the more ordinary of *fishing the water* with sunk fly either up-stream or down-stream. Candidly, I have never seen this method in practice, and I have grave doubts as to its efficacy.

Yet years of practice of this method have made me ever more and more convinced of its soundness, particularly in cases where in place of the wet fly an appropriate pattern of nymph is presented to the feeding trout. This method, moreover, is *not* “fishing the water”.

Halford died in 1913, at a date when the practice of fishing the artificial nymph was not much more than mooted, but the use of the wet fly fished up-stream or up and across

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to selected individual fish had been put definitely on the map; and though both in *Dry Fly Fishing in Theory and Practice* and in his final volume he had authoritatively discredited the possibility of effective representation of the natural nymph, it was the wet fly that was the enemy in the passage which I have quoted.

In the days preceding the advent of the dry fly there were no doubt exceptional fishermen who did some at least of their fishing to individual rising fish; but, taking it by and large, I infer that most of the chalk stream wet-fly fishing was done in rough windy weather with flies which searched the water, being fished dragging across and down. The Diary of the Rev. Richard Durnford, 1809 to 1819, published in 1911 by Henry Nicoll under the title, *Diary of a Test Fisherman*, speaks constantly of "a whistling wind", "a sufficient wind" and so on, and he used "a bob fly to steady the cast". In those times the angler stayed at home on still days. In his Autobiography (p. 83) Halford quotes Major Carlisle (South West) writing of the Houghton Club water in the early 'seventies.

Trout were far easier to catch, while of those who fished, perhaps only half—maybe fewer—had any idea of dry-fly fishing, and it was a common thing to see an angler flailing away with two big flies on the thickest of gut, downstream, and to hear his complaint of not catching anything.

Coming to the Test with his dry-fly experience of the Wandle, with the restricted lengths there available for the individual angler, it is not unnatural that Halford should resent the methods of the down-stream flailer. The heavy and powerful dry-fly rods with their heavy tapered casting lines then in use by dry-fly men were utterly unsuited to present a wet fly up-stream or up and across to fish in position, and it is perhaps not unnatural that Halford

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should have made little or no attempt to do so. When the light rod came in in the early days of the present century, Halford fought against it and I doubt if he ever possessed a rod and line capable of first-rate up-stream wet-fly work in still weather on chalk streams. So, right through his work, whenever he speaks of the use of the wet fly on chalk streams he invariably associates it with the practice of down-stream flogging and “fishing the water” as contrasted with fishing to individual fish.

As this statement has been challenged—notably in a debate on the subject of nymph fishing in chalk streams recently held at the Fly Fishers’ Club—I feel bound to produce chapter and verse in justification of it. At page 36 of *Dry Fly Fishing in Theory and Practice* (1886), in a chapter headed “Floating Flies and Sunk Flies”, Halford writes:

In principle the two methods of fishing are totally and entirely distinct. With the dry or floating fly the angler has in the first instance to find a rising fish, to note accurately the position or what is technically called “spot the rise” and to cast to this fish to the exclusion of any chance work in other parts of the stream. With the sunk or wet-fly on the other hand he casts to a likely place whether he has or has not seen a rise there (more frequently he has not) and in fact his judgment should tell him where from his knowledge of the habits of the fish they are most likely to be found in position or ready to feed. Thus wet-fly fishing is often termed “fishing the water” in contradistinction to the expression “fishing the rise” which is applied to the method of the dry-fly fisherman.

This is no doubt an excellent description of wet-fly fishing as practised on North Country and other rough rivers, but it does not seem ever to have occurred to Halford that the method of “fishing the rise” with the wet fly or nymph might be (as it has been) successfully adopted on chalk streams when the trout were seen to be feeding sub-aqueously.

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I have already quoted at page 66 the passage from his last book, the *Handbook* (1913), in which, in spite of twenty-seven years' intervening experience, and in despite of testimony to the contrary he avowed his disbelief in such a method.

In his intervening work I have found no evidence whatever that he ever changed his mind on the subject. But his Autobiography (1903) contains a passage at pages 69 and 70 which I must quote for the sake of the comment it evokes.

I was much interested, some years since, watching a first-rate wet-fly man, a Yorkshire fisherman, on a portion of the Upper Test. His flies were olive quills of various shades, iron blues, red quills, and such patterns, all of which he used on his native streams, and were dressed with peacock quill bodies, very meagre upright wings, and a single turn of hen hackle for legs. He did not in any way practise the "chuck and chance it" plan, but moved slowly upstream, carefully studying the set of the current and quickly deciding where a feeding fish should be in each run. Sometimes it would be close under the bank, sometimes on the edge of a slack place, and sometimes on the margin of an eddy.

Whenever he had made up his mind as to the most likely spot there, he would make one, or at most two light casts, placing his fly with great accuracy and letting it drift down without drag. Now this I take it was the best possible imitation of the work of a dry-fly fisherman, except that he had not spotted the fish and his fly was not floating in the dry-fly sense. His patterns were very similar in size, colour and form, to those of the ordinary chalk stream fisherman. He used very fine drawn gut, and worked hard from morning to evening, never passing over a likely place without putting a fly into it, and very seldom losing a hooked fish.

It was in the early part of April, during strong westerly and south-westerly winds, when the hatch of duns was sparse, and when, in fact, all conditions were favourable to the sunk and unfavourable to the floating fly. He fished six days on a well-stocked reach of the river and killed in the aggregate seven trout weighing 9 lb. Candidly, I was somewhat surprised at the good result, and have often wondered whether he could repeat the performance. Of

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course the average weight of his fish, just over $1\frac{1}{4}$ lb., was very small for the Test, and two or three of them would have been returned by many dry-fly fishermen.

Let it be clearly understood, however, that this fisherman was most skilful and painstaking, and was a past master in the art of selecting the right spot, and in placing his fly accurately and delicately *there* at the first attempt. Had he merely fished the river up or down, or had he bungled his cast, or moved about rapidly, or, in fact, made any mistakes, I do not believe he would have killed a single trout, so that his bag represents the best possible result, under existing conditions, for a wet fly fisherman on a stream like the Upper Test.

Now on this passage I call my readers' attention to the words, "This I take it was the best possible imitation of the work of a dry-fly fisherman *except that he had not spotted the fish*". The Yorkshire fisherman in question, a Mr Reffitt—a correspondent of my own—was therefore not fishing to individual fish, but guessing, or judging if you prefer it, where the fish ought to be. He was fishing, moreover, in early April, a time of year when the rise is sparse and rarely extends over two hours, and though he fished "hard from morning to evening", we are not told that he fished to any rising fish or even saw any rise.

Halford says, "All conditions were favourable to the sunk and unfavourable to the floating fly". This brings me back to a passage in *Dry Fly Fishing* which shows pretty clearly that Halford did not know what conditions on chalk streams *were* favourable to the sunk fly. It occurs on page 39, where, after describing conditions favourable to the dry fly, Halford proceeds:

On the other hand where no rising or bulging fish are to be seen, and whence it may be inferred that the fish are not taking surface food at all, the conditions are favourable for the use of the sunk fly.

This is quite wrong. Such conditions are *not* favourable for

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the use of the sunk fly. On chalk streams the fish must be as definitely feeding to take wet fly or nymph as to take the floater, with the difference that they are taking sub-aqueously; and they must be either bulging over weeds to the nymph emerging from the weeds, or taking the mature nymph on the verge of hatching. It is clear that the Rev. Richard Durnford knew this, though his most successful fishing was done in rough water.

There is another paragraph in the *Handbook* (at p. 68) in which Halford gives a description of wet-fly fishing, contrasting it with the dry fly. He says:

The wet-fly fisherman does not as a general rule wait for a rising fish, but places his fly (he frequently uses two, three or even four) in a part of the river where, from his experience of the habits of the trout he would expect a feeding fish to be located. Some fish up-stream, some down-stream and some across the stream. In the hands of a past master it is a most scientific and under favourable conditions a very deadly method of fishing.

Now this is an excellent description of the wet-fly method as practised on North Country and other rough rivers, but it is not fair argument to contrast it with the floating fly on chalk streams. Why did he not contrast the dry fly with the modern wet fly as applied to chalk streams? I suggest that the answer is to be found in the paragraph I have already quoted from page 75 of the *Handbook*. He had "grave doubts of its efficacy". In other words, he did not believe it.

Other sentences from the same volume illustrate Halford's attitude towards the wet fly. At page 74 he writes:

Nothing more surely tends to develop further the increasing shyness of the fish than the presence of a few persistent downstream floggers with the sunk fly.

True enough, but do we find anywhere a suspicion even

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that the wet fly or nymph can be fished to subaqueously feeding fish as precisely as the dry fly to surface feeders, and that there is no need for "persistent down-stream flogging"? No.

On the next page he proceeds:

I will at once freely admit that up-stream wet-fly fishing is not so harmful on a chalk stream as the same method pursued down-stream. But in my view the continual flogging and the continual movements of the angler making his way along the bank too often in full view of the trout are however very nearly as destructive of the confidence of the fish as down-stream fishing. Then too the distance covered by the persistent flogger is so great that the limits of any ordinary length of water will be covered many times in a day's fishing.

If it be suggested that the methods there described are characteristic of the modern chalk stream angler with wet fly or nymph, I say they are unmitigated nonsense, intended by the writer to discredit a technique which he did not understand and disliked.

This brings me to the investigation of the question how it came about that a man of his high intelligence, ability and opportunities, so failed in understanding.

Let us turn back to *Dry Fly Fishing* at page 143. He is describing a cold day in May 1885.

It was a day on which a fresh breeze from the north-west was blowing, and so cold was it that, to an idler on the river-bank, it was a difficult matter to keep his hands warm; and yet the number of flies hatching was, even to one accustomed to the plentiful supply on chalk streams, something astonishing. The trout seemed to have appetites which could not be appeased, rushing about in all directions, making heavy bulges under water as they took the larvae rising from the bed of the river, or here and there just breaking the surface as they seized the fly at the very instant of its casting off the envelope in which it had passed the pupa state. This should of itself indicate the fact that it was a most unsuccessful

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day, and that the trout could not be persuaded to look at any artificial fly, as their every movement was to secure the swiftly darting larvae when rising to the surface and before emerging from the shuck.

To dress an artificial representing the larva or pupa is difficult, but not an absolutely impossible task. Having overcome his natural repugnance to descend from what may be described as high art to the less scientific sunk-fly style of fishing, and having succeeded in turning out a fairly good imitation, the amateur is prone to imagine that he has at last solved the problem, and can, by fishing it under water, make sure of a respectable bag at a time when the fish are bulging incessantly at the natural larvae. Alas! how woefully he is *désillusionné*. *The fish will not look at this*, although it is an admirable representation, both in colour and shape, of the natural insect. And what is the reason? To elucidate this, take a handful of weed from the bed of the river and extract from it three or four specimens of the dun larvae with which it abounds; place these in a tumbler of clear water and patiently watch. Those that are nearly ready to hatch, or are rising to the surface for that purpose, seem positively electrified, every feeler or leg, and every fold or rib of their bodies, moving in an eccentric but continual motion. How is it to be expected that a timid, shy fish like a trout, who from painful daily, and even hourly, experience is warned to use the keenest of all the senses with which he has been endowed by nature, viz. his sight, for his protection, should mistake that motionless supine compound of dubbing, silk, quill, and hackle drifting helplessly and lifelessly like a log down the stream, for the active, ever-moving larva sparkling in the sunshine, and varying in colour at every motion as rays of light strike it at different angles?

Now just consider Halford's elucidation. He takes a handful of weed from the bed of the river and extracts dun larvae and finds them extremely active. I have already recounted how to the end he was in the habit of quoting G. S. Marryat's saying, "You can imitate the nymph, but you cannot imitate the wriggle", and there is a passage on page 122 of *Dry Fly Fishing* where, apropos of bulging, Halford writes:

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It is my opinion that the difficulty does not lie in dressing an artificial grub fairly resembling the dun's nymph but in imparting to that imitation the motion and direction taken by the natural insect at that stage of its existence.

It does not seem to have occurred to him that though a nymph—even a nymph nearing maturity—might be highly active when taken from his shelter in the weeds it did not follow that it was always active as the moment approached for it to put off its shuck. I have shown (with reasons), in the chapter on “The Way of a Trout with a Nymph”, that in these conditions it is often practically inert and that, as well observed by Dr Mottram, even when emerging from weeds on the occurrence of bulging, though it may move from side to side (possibly deflected by the changes in the current caused by the sway of the water) its motion is “quite slow and calm, not in the least fast or jerky”.

I have so frequently caught bulging trout with an artificial nymph fished up-stream, and so much more frequently similarly taken trout feeding quietly under banks or in runs on the ascending nymph about to hatch, that I have no doubt whatever about the fact that there is nothing in the activity of the natural nymph to prevent the trout from taking an artificial nymph. A good imitation is in fact an excellent attraction for subaqueously feeding fish.

When however we come to examine what Halford has to say about trout feeding on nymphs in the latter conditions we find only one reference, viz. at page 125 of *Dry Fly Fishing* (1889):

Sometimes fish, when feeding on larvae and nymphae, however, rise quietly, and do not move about much from place to place; and under these circumstances it is almost impossible to distinguish the apparent from the *bona fide* rises, except by watching intently the surface of the water with the view of making certain that the winged duns floating on the stream are being taken. One such case is brought prominently to my mind, when on a hot

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August evening a trout rose steadily under the bank until it was almost pitch dark. For an hour or more I kept on throwing steadily, and, I am vain enough to think, without making any glaring mistake, over this fish. Commencing with a very small pale yellow dun (Flight's Fancy), then trying in succession a blue-winged olive, red quill, ginger quill, hackled-winged red spinner, Jenny spinner, and detached badger, I at length, as a last resource, put up a small silver sedge on an O hook. The very first cast secured a trout upwards of 2 lb.; and knowing that fish feeding on *curses* will occasionally, for some occult reason, take this particular pattern, I fancied that I knew all about it, and made sure that it had been feeding on these annoying little insects. On my return home an autopsy of the contents of its stomach revealed an extraordinary conglomeration of shrimps, caddis, snails, larvae, and nymphae, but not a single winged fly.¹

Here we have Halford hammering for hours a fish which was unquestionably nymphing, offering it in succession seven different patterns of floating dun, and ultimately getting it at dusk with a sedge. It never seems to have occurred to him, either during the incident or at any subsequent time, to fish a trout so feeding otherwise than with the floating fly: and the only credible explanation which occurs to me is that he always believed the nymphs on which the trout were feeding were too active to be successfully represented, and that therefore the sole hope of getting such a fish was to continue trying him with a succession of patterns in the hope that ultimately he might be led to make a mistake. I also infer that the only occasions on which he tried the artificial nymph must have been on bulging fish (I will not suggest with a dragging fly), and that he failed entirely, both then and thereafter, to realise that the fish rising quietly as described were not chasing active nymphs but were feeding on floating nymphs coming up so quietly as to be

¹ This statement is repeated at pp. 167-8 of the 1902 edition without comment or enlargement.

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motionless, or in other words, "practically inert". I am no purist, but I must confess it seems to me at least as unethical to hammer a nymphing trout with a succession of floating flies as to offer a nymph to a trout which is exclusively taking hatched duns, a practice which I do not advocate.

The incident quoted from page 125 of the first edition of *Dry Fly Fishing* is repeated, I believe, verbatim, in the subsequent editions—showing that Halford learned nothing from that or subsequent experience.

Before leaving this phase of the subject I have to refer to a passage on nymph fishing at pages 126-127 of the *Handbook*, where Halford writes:

With respect to the question of dressing imitations of nymphs, I have always urged that any fly-dresser who sets his mind to it can do this easily. Years and years ago Marryat and I dressed most effective patterns to represent the nymphs of duns and mayflies by tying in a few fibres of black feather at the head, constructing the fly generally with a quill body the colour of the abdomen of the natural nymph, hackle short and spare, and the whisks, which were also short, of gallina, were dyed to shade. When the body material had been tied in, the fibres of black feather were bent down into a shallow loop and fastened in at the shoulder to represent the wing cases of the natural nymph, the hackle was then turned, and the fly finished at the head.

We killed a few fish with them, but discontinued their use for two reasons. The first, that in our opinion they were essentially wet flies, and the use of them on waters reserved for dry fly only, constituted a breach of the ethics of the dry fly. The second, which may possibly be a more cogent reason in the minds of many modern anglers, was that wherever and whenever we used them we found that the number of fish hooked and lost was out of all proportion to the total bag, and that the fish rapidly became inordinately shy and unapproachable. This, I think, sums up the position fairly from the dry-fly purist's point of view, and I can only advise my readers to abstain from trying bulging fish either on their own or their friends' fisheries in all cases where the use of the floating fly is considered *de rigueur*.

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most of their lives are spent in weeds and mud on the lower depths of the water, from the angler's point of view the times when they are being taken by trout, so as to give the angler a chance of interposing his imitation, are (1) when the trout are bulging to them over weeds, and (2) when the trout are taking them just under the surface on their way to hatch out. The numerous examinations which I have made of the contents of the stomachs of trout tell me that only a small proportion of the nymphs there found are taken in the middle and lower depths of the water.

At this point it may be convenient if I refer to another statement of Halford's from page 240 of the same chapter. He writes:

In any case it must be remembered that the presence in an autopsy of nymphae just on the point of changing to the winged fly indicates that the fish, *although as a rule under such conditions looking downwards*, has yet followed the *active* nymph towards the surface.

This is another misapprehension on Halford's part. Apart from the fact that the nymph under such conditions is *not* active but in general practically inert, the trout, as clearly demonstrated by Colonel E. W. Harding in *The Fly Fisher and the Trout's Point of View*, is *not* looking downward, but lies with his gaze fixed upward and forward on the mirror-like underside of the surface up-stream of his window, and sees the approaching nymphs reflected in the surface, and rises gently to meet them, preferably near the point where reflection and reality are about to merge.

The paragraph at page 239 goes on:

At the first glance a natural deduction from this would be that the sunk fly would be more likely to tempt than the floating ones. Very possibly many of the sparsely dressed patterns used more generally in the North for wet-fly fishing are taken for some forms of larvae . . . and it has been confidently said by North Country

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anglers of great experience that an adept of this style could work sad havoc on some of the well-stocked shallows of the chalk streams. Unfortunately very few of the disciples of the dry fly practice, even if they understand, the art of fishing the sunk fly, which may account for the fact that as a general rule when tried in the Hampshire streams it has not proved successful. It would be well for a first-rate performer to pay a visit to the Test or Itchen and thoroughly thrash out the point.

In this connection I may mention that I have had a good North Country angler on my own length of the Itchen (which the late William Senior described as the most difficult water he knew) and, fishing with nymphs lightly dressed according to my methods, and presenting them up-stream or across to trout feeding on nymphs, he has made baskets which would have done any Hampshire angler credit.

Halford proceeds:

I confess to feeling grave doubts as to the result. If it is to be judged by any attempt heard of up to the present time, it is foredoomed; if on the other hand previous failures have been due to want of knowledge and experience on the part of the fisherman, it is quite on the cards that it might revolutionise the whole art of fly fishing as practised in Hampshire.

If, however, as I am inclined to predict, there should be a fiasco the natural question is to enquire whether it is possible to take these wary fish when feeding under water with an imitation of their natural food. The larva has been frequently imitated and has occasionally done well, but strange to relate on the days when it has done well, it has almost invariably turned out that other fishermen have done well with the dry fly.

That is a general statement which it is impossible to check. It is not my experience. I have known many occasions when the nymph alone was being taken, the hatched dun being wholly neglected, and but few occasions when trout feeding on the surface fly were wholly unattracted by the nymph.

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Halford proceeds, "It has generally been in early spring when the trout are comparatively easy to catch". I do not agree. I have used the nymph successfully right through the season, even in the most difficult days of July and August, and have taken some of my largest trout on it.

Again Halford, misled no doubt by the contrast of dry-fly methods with the superseded wet-fly methods in use on chalk streams, was led to infer that still days and hot sun and clear water are fatal to the wet-fly (or nymph) fisher. He writes on page 29 of *Dry Fly Fishing*:

As to conditions of weather, on the stillest days with the hottest sun and in the clearest water, the fish are generally on the surface where the wet-fly fisher would consider the conditions most unpropitious and unlikely on such days to kill fish is most gratifying to the angler's bump of self-esteem; and often the largest and most suspicious fish feeding under such conditions seem quite guileless and fall victims to the art of the dry-fly fisherman.

I would assure Halford, if he were here to receive my assurance, that on such days when the trout are taking the mature nymph rising to hatch, the like success may be predicated for the nymph fisher or the wet-fly fisher casting the right pattern of nymph or wet fly to selected individual feeding fish. In such conditions it is often the case that the trout are exclusively nymphing and are letting the floating natural dun go by; but they will take an appropriately dressed nymph where they would ignore the artificial floating dun.

In other places Halford suggests that only small (often unsizable) fish are taken with the sunk fly and that many are pricked and lost. On page 71 of the *Handbook* he pictures as typical an angler who

will proceed to the upper limit of the fishery and flog it steadily down with wet fly. He will probably see some fish following his

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fly; occasionally even plucking at it and getting pricked; a few, but a very small proportion being landed, and of these the vast majority yearlings or two-year-olds. Perchance he may succeed in getting two or three killable trout, but these as a rule are only just up to or possibly under the legal limit of the fishery.

I need hardly say that this is not a method which is within my contemplation as legitimate wet-fly or nymph fishing. Fishing and searching the water with a dragging wet fly is undoubtedly apt to lead to the catching or pricking or scaring of unsizable fish. But the illegitimacy of such practices affords no reason for forbidding the use of the nymph or wet-fly cast up-stream or across to subaqueously feeding fish. And nowhere do I find in Halford's books any reference to such methods except the passage from the *Handbook*, quoted at page 66, in which Halford not only expresses his lack of belief in them but says he *had never seen the method in practice*. Nevertheless it is a great method and a fascinating one, and it has brought me the great bulk of my largest trout and has greatly increased my score of 2-pounders on a river where 2-pounders are by no means everyday fish.

On page 45 of *Dry Fly Fishing* Halford says:

On one point all must agree, viz. that fishing up-stream with the finest of gut and floating the tiniest of flies is far more exacting and requires in many respects more skill than the *fishing of the water* as practised by the wet-fly fisherman.

Exactly the same claim may be made for nymph fishing as defined and advocated by me.

The modern wet-fly fisher and the nymph fisher on chalk streams who know their business are *not* "fishing the water" but casting to individual selected subaqueously feeding fish in position.

On the question of comparative skill as between that

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method and the dry fly I do not wish to dogmatise. I do not pretend to be an exceptionally skilful fisherman. My practice, like that perhaps of many other anglers, often falls short of my theoretical knowledge. But I may say I have heard not a few skilled dry-fly fishermen confess that to fish the artificial nymph according to my method was beyond them.

I do not think it necessary to pitch my case for fishing the artificial nymph to nymphing trout so high as to say that it revolutionises the entire practice of Hampshire trout fishing. In fact it leaves the correct practice of dry-fly fishing intact for all occasions where it is applicable, but it *does* fill a gap in the armament of the chalk stream angler, in providing him with a clean and sportsmanlike method of meeting those hours (and it is often those days) when trout are nymphing and letting the upwinged dun go by disregarded.

My claim therefore for nymph fishing is that it enables the angler to approach a nymph-taking trout with success in bright weather and smooth water in conditions which authority had hitherto held to be almost impossible, that it enables an angler to deal with a nymph-feeding trout, which would either be hammered in vain by the dry-fly fisherman, or else, if he were a real understanding purist, be left despairingly alone; and that thus the method of nymph fishing which my good friend the late H. T. Sheringham called "exact wet-fly fishing" constitutes as real if not as great an advance in the art of fly fishing as the dry fly indubitably did. It has the merit of superseding or getting over serious difficulties and limitations of the dry fly and so adding to the angler's chances of sport.

Though I have subjected the works of Halford to so critical an analysis, it is only because he has been beyond

THE PRONOUNCEMENTS OF HALFORD

question the dominant writer on chalk stream fishing, and it is only just to say that no other writers on that subject ever seem to have suspected the propensity of chalk stream trout to feed largely on nymphs (outside the practice of bulging) prior to my calling attention to the subject—or even (apart from Dr J. C. Mottram, Eric Taverner and Colonel E. W. Harding) since.

H. S. Hall, who was Halford's contemporary and wrote of the dry fly in the Badminton Library just before *Floating Flies and How to Dress Them* appeared and took the angling world by storm, is silent on the subject. Viscount Grey seems to have had no suspicion of the state of the case, nor had Major Fisher (*Rod and River*, 1892), nor Lord Buxton. Earl Hodgson, though he mocked at the pretensions of the dry-fly purist, gives no reason for the faith that was in him. Passing outside the chalk stream area we find nothing on the subject in Stewart's *Practical Angler*, nothing in David Foster's *Scientific Angler*, nothing in E. M. Tod and nothing in any of the wet-fly authorities. The subject is in fact relatively a new one, and that must be my justification for inflicting yet another book on the patient fly-fishing public.

XI

PROS AND CONS

THE dry-fly man, after the long innings he has had, is often not of an open mind, and is unwilling to give up the exclusive doctrine of the dry fly, and he therefore seeks for arguments to justify it.

If he insists that trout will not look at the nymph and I prove the contrary, then he claims:

- (1) That nymph fishing is easier than the dry fly, mainly because of the matter of drag;
- (2) That it kills more fish, *i.e.* is too deadly and leaves too few fish for the relatively finer art of the dry fly;
- (3) That persistence in the use of the nymph drives the fish to feed deep by killing off those which feed just under the surface;
- (4) That trout feed mainly on nymphs and only take floating flies as a sort of sport or delicacy and that it is right that there should be one part of their habitat where they can feed with confidence and need have no fear of the angler's wiles;
- (5) That for all or some of these reasons the use of the nymph on chalk streams is ethically wrong.

To all this the nymph fisher replies:

- (1) If it is so much easier than the dry fly, why do so few relatively practise it—and still fewer competently? As a matter of fact it has difficulties of its own, not excluding the matter of drag. Moreover many anglers

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refuse to try it as being beyond them. Indeed there must be hundreds of chalk stream anglers who are unable to distinguish between the rise of a trout to the floating natural insect and his rise to a nymph, and so go on despairingly and vainly hammering nymphing trout with floating flies.

- (2) If it kills more fish, is that an objection? Why, pray, was the dry fly advocated but because it provided a method of killing fish not amenable to the previous practice of the wet fly? Well, nymph fishing provides a method of taking trout when they are not amenable to the attractions of the dry fly.
- (3) I am afraid the answer to the dry-fly man's third point is the rude one—"Skittles". As well say that the persistent presentation of the dry fly has driven trout to nymphing. My own observation is that on the waters where I have been using the nymph for years the growing tendency of the trout has been to nymph more and more and to do so at and just under the surface.
- (4) If one analyses the contents of the stomach of a trout, and finds, as he constantly will find, that it consists almost entirely of nymphs, it will be obvious that in confining himself to the floating fly the angler will either be condemning himself to inactivity for the greater part if not all of his fishing day or be casting floating flies to trout which are feeding exclusively below the surface. If and when trout will not feed on the surface, the only way to get them is to fish them where they are feeding. Of course any riparian owner or lessee may make any rules he likes for his water, and his guests and any guest accepting his hospitality must in honour and decency abide by his

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conditions. But in the absence of such conditions, it is trying poor angling nature and patience rather high to insist that one is bound to refrain from offering his ephemeral simulacrum wet or from fishing at all on occasions when the trout are feeding subaqueously. For, make no mistake, trout will go on for hours nymphing, and will either take no notice of the dry fly or will be put down by it if it drags, and in such conditions it is unethical on the dry-fly man's own principles for him to go on hammering with a dry fly a fish which is consistently confining himself to nymphs. The reasonable practice is to offer the fish the best possible representation of what he is taking where he is taking it, whether above water or below.

One angler of my acquaintance goes so far as to argue that to fish the nymph is not fly fishing, a nymph being no more a fly than a caterpillar is a moth or a butterfly. Well, the term "fly fishing" was applied to wet-fly work on chalk streams long years, even centuries, before the advent of the dry fly, at times when the wet fly was certainly often taken for a nymph, though no doubt very few of those who used it realised the fact. The modern practice is merely to use a better ephemeral representation with better knowledge, enabling the angler to do in still water what previously required a ruffle; and no nymph fisher need have any ill-conscience about following in the footsteps of the great anglers of the past.

Halford's argument against the use of the artificial nymph was, "It was a breach of the ethics of the dry fly".

(If that means that he was fishing waters where it was a condition that the dry fly only might be used, it is irrelevant

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as an argument against the use of the nymph on waters where that condition is not explicitly or implicitly imposed.)

He advises his readers to abstain from "trying *bulging* fish either on their own or their friends' waters *where the floating fly is considered de rigueur*—a question-begging phrase. No decent angler would break conditions laid down by or implicit in his leave. But the opinion is quite irrelevant to the question whether nymph fishing to fish feeding on nymphs is itself a fair and reasonable practice. The decision does not depend on reason, but on the will of the owner of the fishing.

It is noteworthy that this advice of Halford applies to fishing for "bulging" trout. His description of bulging trout is to be found a little further on in the *Dry Fly Man's Handbook*, page 116, where he says:

When feeding on larvae or nymphae it (the trout) is described as "bulging", from its motion through the water.

At page 125 there follows a more elaborate description:

He will see movements at or near the surface of a pronounced nature caused by fish ploughing their way through the water upwards, moving from side to side and occasionally he may even distinguish the head of a fish just showing above the water. . . . The fish are busily engaged in chasing and securing the active nymphs, coming up through the water to the surface.

Not a word, it will be observed, about the far more common case when trout are lying in runs under the banks, or between weeds in the open, and meeting quietly and without pursuit or excitement the nymphs brought to them by the current, and letting the hatched duns go by them unnoticed.

I suggest that the natural course is to offer the fish the best possible representation of what he is feeding on where he is taking it, whether on or below the surface.

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In the Debate which took place on February 1938 in the Fly Fishers' Club on the subject of "Nymph Fishing in Chalk Streams" the protagonist of the purists argued with a great show of authority that I was wrong and Halford right on every point on which I had challenged his dicta, in connection with nymph fishing—particularly on the question of the activity of the mature nymph on its way up to hatch—(I have already dealt with this aspect of the case). And then he went on to quote cases in which he claimed that first-rate Test fisheries had been ruined by the use of the nymph. It did not seem to strike him (or his hearers except me) that if Halford was right and the trout would not look at the artificial nymph, it would be curious that the fish should have been so affected by the use of the nymph that they (though of course not caught with the nymph) should have become unamenable to the temptation of the dry fly. Had they been scared out of the lengths in question or had they become so nervous that they had been driven to bottom feeding? Information on these points was not afforded.

Of course Halford was wrong in saying that the trout would not look at the artificial nymph. Not only I, but many others, have proved that over and over again. Therefore the grounds for objecting to the use of the nymph had to be shifted.

XII

HOOKS

THE bodies of most nymphs being relatively long and straight, I recommend for the dressing of their representations patterns of hooks with a longish straight shank and a sufficient but not too wide a gape. For nymphs of sizes No. 0 new notation, or No. 15 old notation, and upwards, the older Pryce-Tannatt down-eyed round bend was ideal. It is, I believe, no longer obtainable, but an almost identical round bend is readily procurable. In the sizes Nos. 15, 16 and 17, Pennell's down-eyed sneck bends are excellent. Down-turned-eyed hooks show far less of a disposition to make the fly skirt than do hooks with upturned eyes. These patterns take and maintain an exceptionally good grip.

I do not care about the Limerick bend for nymph patterns, the bare part of the hook being much more obvious than I like.

Before Bartleets became amalgamated with or absorbed in Milwards, they used to make a series of small down-eyed sneck-bend hooks of very fine wire but great strength, and a feature of them was that the more the trout pulled the deeper the hook buried. The series of them ran about a size smaller than the corresponding numbers in the old notation and the most useful sizes were Nos. 14, 15, 16 and 17, the first being equivalent to a small No. 0 or 15 Carlisle, and the smallest to a 0000. On the last-named size I have killed trout of 3 lb. 2 oz. and 2 lb. 15 oz. (among others) and have had to cut the hook out of the fish when landed. But

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I fear that these wonderful hooks are no longer obtainable. They were never so good during or after the war as before it. On the whole therefore for the smaller sizes of nymph I do not think the angler can do much better than use the down-eyed Pennell sneck, and No. 15 is about the largest size suitable for chalk streams, but for the Usk or other rivers where the natural flies, and therefore the nymphs, run larger, a down-eyed round bend of sizes No. 1, 2 or even 3 may not be too big.

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mobile hackle on a rough stream is more apt to attract the attention of the trout than a strict representation of the nymph. But he would, I am sure, agree that the mobile-hackled pattern does not in fact represent a nymph but a winged fly caught and tumbled by the current, probably in the very act of hatching. Another first-rate angler of my acquaintance finds nymphs dressed after my prescription more effective than hackled flies on the same class of rough stream, and in lakes.

In patterns of some nymphs which are dark at the thorax and light in the legs a rather larger hackle may be used if a dark-centred feather be selected to cover and blend with the pad of dubbing which represents the thorax, the lighter points of the hackle representing the legs.

The legs of nymphs are often dark. Those that are pale are usually dull in colour—but in collecting hackles no shade should be neglected. The legs and whisks of the Blue-winged Olive have a definite freckle in them, but it is hard to find either cock or hen hackles with the appropriate freckle in them sufficiently close. Partridge hackles have the freckle too widely spaced and are too brown. It occurs to me that the tips of the mallard breast feather dyed as used for Mayfly wings and tied in in a small bunch and divided might serve.

Poultry hackles are not the only suitable feathers. Short scapular feathers of the thrush, the hen blackbird, the missel thrush, the landrail and other small wild fowl make quite useful substitutes and have the added advantage of being thicker in the individual fibre than poultry hackles and therefore more like the legs of the natural nymph.

I have often seen it stated that the spider patterns of the North of England and Southern Scotland are "exactly like nymphs". They are not so, except possibly when fished down-

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stream with a drag which makes the hackle hug the body. They are far more probably suggestive of the subimago caught and tumbled by the stream in the very act of hatching. The old-fashioned winged patterns with the wings, thin slips of feather, lying close over the back, with the hackle sloping back close to the hook, so as to ensure a "good entry" when fished down-stream, or with a drag, were much more like nymphs.

XIV

DRESSING METHODS

THOUGH, as Halford says in more than one of his books, the dressing of a nymph (to resemble the natural insect) is not a difficult matter, it must not be assumed that what when dry looks to the eye a good representation is necessarily so in fact. When wetted it may look very different.

I therefore venture to put before my readers a few matters which my experience of a good many years suggests should not be neglected.

In the first place most of the nymphs, excluding those of the Blue-winged Olive and flat or crawling nymphs like those of the March Brown and *Rhithrogena semicolorata* (yellow upright), are long, thin and taper. In tying them therefore it is well to do so on hooks with, relatively, a good length of shank and a bend differing from the Limerick, which shows too much metal behind the tying. See Chapter XII on Hooks, page 91.

With the actual natural nymph to be represented floating under one's eye in a baby plate or a white saucer, the length of hook shank necessary to give room for the thorax and abdomen can be exactly ascertained, by laying the hook alongside the actual natural nymph. In the representation it is well to get the actual outline and taper as correct as possible. And it may be borne in mind that the natural nymph, floating in the basin, having probably been absorbed by the trout when it was just on the verge of hatching, is the full size to which it can attain. For the

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comfort of the angler it may be mentioned that a nymph, since it has a shuck to shed, is necessarily larger than the insect which, but for an unkind fate, would have emerged from that shuck.

Observing the natural nymphs floating in the baby plate or saucer, the first point which strikes one is that the general effect of them is darker than one would have expected; and the next is that in nymphs the thorax is essentially opaque, while the abdomen is in almost all cases more or less translucent. There is no difficulty about getting the thorax of your artificial nymph opaque.

I regard it however as of much consequence to suggest that translucency in the representation of the abdomina in the artificial nymphs. This effect may be obtained by various means. One of these involves the use of quills for bodies—but the fish will only see the translucent effect of the quill in certain lights. Passing the fish on one side it may look to the fish at once translucent and natural. On any other approach it may look dead and opaque. The effect of translucency of the quill may be heightened by the winding of fine gold or silver wire at intervals corresponding with the segmentation of the abdomen of the natural insect. Some of the nymphs with brown abdomina are well suggested by the quills from the side of the stalk of the eye feather of the peacock, stripped of its flues, of course. In tying these patterns the tying silk used should be purple or brownish grey, well waxed. This is the quill used in the Devonshire Blue Upright when correctly tied.

Most artificial nymphs however are dressed with a fur or wool dubbing—fur or wool being so extraordinarily translucent as to let the colour of the underlying tying silk be seen through it, and having the further advantage of taking up water readily. Seal's fur, with or without an

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admixture of some soft fur like hare's poll, to enable it to be spun easily, is exceptionally full of light. A gold rib is however almost essential to keep this somewhat stubborn material in place. This observation does not of course apply to the soft silky cream-coloured down of the baby seal. I believe that that is found beneath the coarser fibres of seal's fur usually used for fly dressing. Of course dubbing can only be laid on over a basis of tying silk.

For this reason it is well to study the underlying colour of the spinners of the natural insects of the same species, and to suggest that colour as the base colour of one's nymph by the use of appropriate tying silk. But as I said at the opening of this chapter it does not follow that because when, out of the water, an artificial nymph is dry it looks a good imitation, it will do so when it is wet. I have used opossum fur to suggest the body of a pale nymph and found that though when dry it seemed very life-like, when wet it was quite unlike the natural insect. That is only an example of what I mean. So the dresser should soak his imitation thoroughly and, laying it alongside of the natural insect in the water in the plate, not rest satisfied until the colour of the imitation is so exact that, if his artificial were placed among the nymphal contents of the trout's stomach, it would, at first sight at any rate, only be distinguishable from the natural insect by the presence of the hook. And here let me say that this precision of dressing is worth while. Some natural nymphs have the appearance of bleeding at the head and thorax. An exceptionally killing pattern (No. XV, p. 116) represents this species. It may also be nicely suggested by a body of tap material with little red seal's fur in the mixture.

The usual range of furs may be employed, but in addition to mole, hare's ear and poll, rabbit's poll and belly and

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opossum, fox and English blue squirrel, I like to have a supply of the soft creamy fur from the skin of a baby seal. It matches some of the paler nymph bodies excellently. Other parts of the hare are also very useful for abdomina, while the darker furs suggest wing cases.

The abdominal parts of the body of the nymph may however in some patterns be suggested by floss or artificial silk. On no account should there be any tying silk, waxed or unwaxed, underneath the floss or artificial silk in such patterns. That puts an end at once to translucency. A degree of it can however be retained if the floss or other silk be tied in at the shoulder after the whisks (with the short waste end pointing towards the bend of the hook) then wound over the bare hook to the bend, passed under the whisks, then over and back to the shoulder, where it is secured. I have not found a gold or silver wire ribbing of any value in nymphs dressed with floss or artificial silk bodies. If the hook shank be first painted with the opaque white enamel called Cellire, the floss or artificial silk wound over it will necessarily look lighter than when wound on a bare hook. But on a bare hook there is still a good deal of translucency; just as when dyed gut or horsehair is wound on a bare hook the metal is not seen through it.

Bodies of dyed gut and horsehair are, to my mind, too hard to be satisfactory, though they look well.

Other bodies with some degree of translucency may be made with various herls. Of these the best I know is from the heron in various shades of blue, which, when dyed in a solution of picric acid or in a decoction of onion skin in vinegar, produce a beautiful series of semi-translucent olives. The next best herl I know is a brownish blue feather from the domestic goose similarly treated. Both these herls are tender and require to be protected by having wound

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over them some turns of fine gold wire or yellow silk, the wire being the more effective. The segmentation of the body of the insect is thus suggested.

When natural nymphs are closely inspected there will be found along the body certain breathing apparatus known as branchiae. If it be desired to reproduce the effect of these, it is possible to do so by using for the body material certain quills which, on being wound, show at the edge of each turn an effect very similar to the branchiae on the natural insect. An example of the kind of feather is the red wing-feather of the peacock, dyed olive in picric acid or otherwise. Another example is the queer grey feather which the peacock erects behind his brilliant eyed tail feathers to keep them standing. This grey feather, when dyed olive and wound on, a single strand at a time, produces quite a good branchial effect. But it is a very tender feather and needs to be fortified with gold or silver wire. Another method is to wind a hackle all down the body and to cut the fibres closely.

India-rubber bodies, especially if tied with thin rubber such as is used in toy balloons, have an extremely life-like appearance—but I never did any good with them and the india-rubber tends to deliquesce and perishes rapidly, so that these patterns cannot be dressed for stock.

Nymphs ribbed with gold or silver wire do not keep very well, the wire tarnishing and losing brilliance and seldom lasting bright into a second season. It is better therefore to dress such nymphs fresh and fresh as they are needed.

In tying nymph patterns it is well not to let the tying silk show except at the head and the tail—and then only if in harmony with the general effect—as otherwise it gives an unfinished effect.

This is particularly conspicuous in quill bodies. For a

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quill body made with a brown strand from the side of the stalk of the eyed feather of the peacock's tail, I have recommended that the tying silk to be used should be either what is known to fly dressers as purple or a well-waxed brownish grey, or some such neutral shade. For the pale shades of blue quill bodies grey silk with or without a shade of brown is harmonious.

Finally, whisks should be kept short, only long enough to help the hook to swim naturally in the water; and the hackles to represent the legs of the insect should be short and sparsely tied, not more than two turns at most (better one turn in most cases), and they should be close up against and supported by the dubbing which suggests the wing cases.

I am in favour of finishing (whether with the whip finish or two half hitches) with the hackle close to the eye of the hook, with just enough room for the knot of the gut to be nestling on the hackle.

The wing cases of the natural nymph are quite a definite feature of his make-up. So when first I began to attempt serious representations of the natural insect I thought it essential to tie in slips of feather of a different colour from—darker than—the body material, and I even tried using the uncut tips of the same feather to represent the insect's legs. Two methods of nymph building of this type are described and illustrated at pages 124 and 128 of *The Way of a Trout with a Fly*. A realisation however that the legs of the nymph almost invariably differ in colour from the wing cases led me to use a third method—tying in a hackle as the first step and winding it at the shoulder as the last step in the process prior to bringing the wing case material over the back, whipping it down behind the eye, cutting away the waste and finishing with the whip finish and a touch of varnish.

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Another method, enabling one to use feathers of birds other than poultry at once for legs and wing cases was as follows:

Having selected your hackle, draw back all the fibres except the extreme tip, cut away the tip close and shake back the fibres to their natural position. Then, having first formed and completed the body of your nymph, wind the silk within three turns of the eye, lay the hackle with the underside upward on the hook, tie it down with two or three turns of the silk, pull the hackle by the stalk so as to leave only enough length for the legs projecting. Then whip over the hackle to the end of the body—secure the work with a half hitch, spin on the dubbing for the thorax and wind to near the eye. Then bring the hackle by the stalk over the thorax so as to divide the points of the hackle fibres right and left as nearly equally as possible, then tie down the hackle and stalk at the eyes and finish with the whip finish. This is a good method for such a pattern as the Iron Blue tied with a hackle of cock Jackdaw's throat (Pattern X, p. 114).

I found however that all these methods, except, perhaps, the last, produced an effect heavier and clumsier than was consistent with quite a good representation of the natural nymph, and I took to suggesting the wing cases by spinning on a patch of dubbing darker than the body material behind the hackle, which had the effect of keeping the hackle, wound at the head, from clinging to the body, and of representing the wing cases quite effectively in moving water. This method of tying has served me well, producing a far more delicate nymph-like effect than any of the other processes and proving highly acceptable to the trout—and big trout at that.

Since 1910 I have had over a quarter of a century's

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concentrated experience of fishing the artificial nymph when the trout appeared to me to be feeding subaqueously, and I think I may claim to have made definite progress in the evolution of successful dressings of representations of the natural nymph, especially since I took to the use of the marrow scoop for extracting the contents of the stomachs of trout and of the white enamelled cup by the water side and of the baby plate at home for washing out and identifying the items of these contents.

It may be convenient if I here describe my latter-day process in detail:

- (1) Fix a down-eyed hook of appropriate size and length in the vice.
- (2) Select tying silk of appropriate colour for the body, double it round the bend of the hook—spin it in a twist and wax it with colourless wax.
- (3) Unspin the waxed silk. Take the short end between left forefinger and thumb and lay it over the hook against the eye.
- (4) Whip three turns from right to left over the short end and twitch or cut off the short waste end.
- (5) Whip on the selected hackle for the legs with the stalk towards the tail and wind silk to middle of body. ,
- (6) Snap or cut off the stalk of the hackle and wind silk to within three or four turns of the bend.
- (7) Pick two or three fibres of the whisk feather (Gallena is as good as anything, having a valuable degree of stiffness which is not excessive) and pass the roots *under* the hook. The first turn of the silk should bring them neatly on top of the hook. The natural insect has short whiskers and the artificial should have short whiskers too, but not quite so short as some of the

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natural nymphs have — the slightly longer whisks helping to keep the hook on a level keel instead of sinking tail first. Two more turns of silk and a touch of celluloid varnish secure the whisks, and the waste ends can be cut or broken off or left to be tied in with the dubbing or floss or quill so as to assist the taper of the body.

- (8) If gold or silver wire or silk is to be used as ribbing, it should be bound in at this stage, lying along the body and pointing over the whisks.
- (9) Next, if the body is to be quill or herl or floss silk, it is bound in similarly.
- (10) The tying silk is then wound to the shoulder, and
- (11) The quill or herl or floss is wound on and secured at the shoulder and followed by the ribbing, and the excess is cut away.
- (12) If the body is to be dubbing, then, instead of steps (10) and (11) the dubbing is spun on the tying silk, tapering from tail to shoulder and wound.
- (13) The ribbing (if any) is then wound on and secured.
- (14) A short length of darker dubbing to match and suggest the wing cases of the natural nymph is then spun on the tying silk, wound to the root of the hackle, and secured with one half hitch.
- (15) The hackle is then wound in front of the thorax, not more than two turns, the tying silk is passed twice through it and is secured by two half hitches or a whip finish at the eye. A touch of celluloid varnish makes all secure and the waste end of the silk is cut away and the nymph is complete.

Some of the nymphs require different coloured tying silks for body and thorax. In such cases one cuts away the

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body tying silk after securing the body material, waxes a short length of the appropriate silk for the thorax, winds it over the root of the hackle to the lower end of the thorax, and then steps Nos. 13 to 15 follow.

If care be taken not to overdress the nymph and to secure the right taper of the body and the correct bulk of the pad of dubbing which is to suggest the wing cases, it is wonderful what a lifelike representation of the nymph may be secured.

I re-emphasise that in tying nymphs the tier should choose his tying silk with due regard to the under or essential colour of the body of the nymph he is representing and that on occasion he should use different colours for thorax and abdomen. The under or essential colour is likely to be that of the spinner, *i.e.* the mature insect. As I have said before, the abdomen of the natural nymph is in many cases more or less translucent—the thorax is generally substantially opaque. In a number of nymphs, as in their subimagines, the eyes are of a definitely bright colour, such as red; and it can do no harm, and may conceivably do good, to reproduce this feature in the artificial nymph.

Some tiers dress nymphs with nothing but the tying silk to represent the abdomen, with or without rib, and in this instance no special precaution is needed unless a different tying silk be used for the thorax. Floss bodies—if the floss be laid over the tying silk—should have tying silk matching the floss body as precisely as possible and waxed with clear colourless wax. But a better plan is to tie in the whisks at the shoulder with the silk to be used for the thorax, then to tie in the floss with a short waste end towards the bend. Next to wind the floss over the whisks and the waste end of floss to the tail, then once under the whisks and back over the shank to the shoulder, when the floss is secured and

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the end cut away. The dubbing for the thorax is then spun on the hackle, wound and secured, and the nymph is finished in the usual way.

It will be seen that these nymph patterns are very simple and can be rapidly tied—half a dozen, or more, may be constructed in an hour—and if they are built, as they should be, with the natural insect as model floating under one's eye in a baby plate to be matched in length, colour and proportions, one may justly hope for sport with them on those many occasions when the trout are taking nymph just under the surface in preference to the floating fly. In a recent week-end in the three brace from $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb. to 3 lb. 5 oz. which I killed with artificial nymph I found three winged flies only (one a spinner) among masses of nymph! and this is by no means a unique experience.

XV

PATTERNS

THE following are, to the date of writing, the most successful dressings of nymphs (built to suggest 'the natural insect'), which I have so far evolved from my chalk stream experience. They are not put forward as standard patterns either for the chalk streams or other rivers. I have no doubt that in time they will be improved upon. Certainly on some other rivers, of which the Usk may be taken as an example, the upwinged duns and their nymphs differ considerably, and in the Usk are a good deal larger and brighter than the Hampshire insects. Moreover, in the chalk streams (and no doubt elsewhere) nymphs of the same species differ in colour according to conditions which are not yet understood, and may be of soil, light, food, habitat or what not. The reader must therefore attribute to this fact the differing dressings attributed to the nymph of the same natural fly. The materials are specified in the order in which they should be used. The first fifteen are illustrated in the coloured plate.

LARGE DARK OLIVE OF SPRING

I. *April and Early May*

Hook.—No. 1 or 2 down-eyed round bend, or No. 14 down-eyed Pennell sneck.

Tying Silk.—Full yellow, waxed with brown harness-maker's wax.

Hackle.—Dark blue dun hen, or cockerel with woolly centre, the centre covering the dubbing suggests the wing cases and the points suggesting the legs.

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Whisk.—Two or three strands of dark *unspeckled* neck feathers of the cock Gallena (guinea-fowl) dyed dark greenish.

Rib.—Fine gold wire.

Body.—Darkest green olive seal's fur tapered from tail to shoulder and there definitely thickened.

MEDIUM OLIVE DUN

Following the Large Dark Olive of spring and continuing through the season.

II. *Early in Season*

Hook.—No. 1 down-eyed round bend or No. 15 down-eyed Pennell sneck.

Tying Silk.—Primrose, waxed with clear colourless wax.

Hackle.—Short woolly blue feather from breast of blue bantam cock or hen, two or, at most, three turns.

Whisks.—Two fibres of brownish blue *unspeckled* feather from neck of cock guinea-fowl undyed—short.

Rib.—Optional—yellow tying silk, gold wire, or none.

Body.—Hare's fleck or, for a paler pattern, hare's poll.

III. *Early May*

Hook.—No. 1 or even 2 down-eyed round bend.

Tying Silk.—Grey brown, waxed with colourless wax.

Hackle.—Light medium honey dun hen, short in fibre. Two turns.

Whisks.—Two strands pale-brownish blue cock guinea-fowl's neck—short.

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Rib.—Fine silver wire or none.

Body.—*Abdomen*: Pale-brown peacock's quill, stripped.

Thorax: Hare's poll.

IV. June

Hook.—No. 1 down-eyed round bend or No. 15 Pennell sneck.

Tying Silk.—Primrose, waxed with brown harness-maker's wax.

Hackle.—Dark-blue hen or cockerel.

Whisks.—Two strands of unspeckled pale-blue cock guinea-fowl's neck—short.

Rib.—Fine gold wire.

Body.—*Abdomen*: Raw lamb's wool mixed with brown olive seal's fur—just enough to shade it.

Thorax: English squirrel's blue fur.

V. May, June and July

Hook.—No. 15 or 16 down-eyed Pennell sneck.

Tying Silk.—Purple or grey brown, waxed with dark wax.

Hackle.—Dark-blue dun hen or cockerel, to extend slightly beyond the dubbing of thorax.

Whisks.—Two strands of dark unspeckled neck feathers of cock guinea-fowl—tied very short.

Rib (optional).—Silver wire.

Body.—*Abdomen*: Strand of brown quill from the stalk of the eye feather of a peacock, stripped.

Thorax: A wad of dark hare's ear, close up to the hackle.

VI. *June and July*

Hook.—No. 1 down-eyed round bend, or No. 15 or 16 down-eyed Pennell sneck.

Tying Silk.—Pale orange, waxed with clear colourless wax.

Hackle.—Darkish blue cockerel's hackle, one turn or, at most, two—very short.

Whisks.—Two strands of darkish unfreckled cock guinea-fowl's neck—short.

Body.—*Abdomen*: Three or four strands of pale covert feather of heron dyed in picric acid and wound from tail to shoulder.

Thorax: English blue squirrel's fur or, as a change, dark hare's ear.

A variety of shades of this pattern may be dressed by using darker or lighter heron's herl for the body. A very deadly fly on its day.

VII. *May and throughout season when small darkish Watery Dun is on*

Hook.—No. 16 down-eyed Pennell sneck.

Tying Silk.—Bright yellow, waxed with clear colourless wax.

Hackle.—Dark-blue hen short—not more than 2 turns.

Whisks.—Two strands darkish blue unspeckled feather from neck of cock guinea-fowl—short.

Body.—Thinly laid dubbing of mole's fur mixed with yellow seal's fur.

This pattern is adapted from John Younger's favourite pattern of olive dun. The body may be varied by using English squirrel blue fur instead of mole. It has proved in

PATTERNS

the one season during which I have tried it a very useful pattern.

VIII. *July and August*

Hook.—No. 15 down-eyed Pennell sneck.

Tying Silk.—Pale carrot colour, waxed with clear colourless wax, at shoulder only.

Hackle.—Brownish dun with paler points—short.

Whisks.—Two strands of pale-brownish blue unfreckled neck feather of cock guinea-fowl—short.

Body.—*Abdomen*: Pale-pinkish artificial silk tied in at shoulder and wound over its waste end and the whisk fibres and bare shank to near bend and then once under the whisks and back in successive turns to shoulder.

Thorax: Hare's poll.

This nymph when wet through goes a sort of honey brown translucent hue. Very deadly on its day. Its defect is that the silk is apt to tear with the trout's teeth and get fluffy.

JULY DUN

IX. *July and August*

Hook.—No. 17 down-eyed Pennell sneck.

Tying Silk.—Pale orange, waxed with colourless wax.

Hackle.—Rusty dun cock, very short in fibre—one turn.

Whisks.—Two strands cock guinea-fowl's neck feather dyed in picric acid and tied very short.

Rib.—Fine gold wire.

Body.—*Abdomen*: Medium blue fox fur, brightly dyed in picric acid.

Thorax: Dark-brownish olive seal's fur or some darkish dun fur as a variation.

IRON-BLUE DUN

X. *Late April to end of July and a smaller Variety from mid-August to End of Season*

Hook.—No. 15 Bartleets B 7362 or, if that cannot be had, No. 17 down-eyed Pennell sneck.

Tying Silk.—Crimson, waxed with colourless wax.

Hackle.—Shortest hackle from throat of cock jackdaw—
one turn or, at most, two.

Whisks.—Three strands of soft white hen hackle—quite short.

Body.—Mole's fur spun thinly on the tying silk exposing two turns of silk at tail, tapering to thickest at shoulder.
See also p. 104.

PALE WATERY DUNS

There are four varieties of Pale Watery of which three are common and some or other are on from mid-April to the end of the season and later. I have seen them hatching in bitter weather when fishing for grayling in December. These nymphs vary a great deal in colour and within limits in size.

XI. *April and May, and again in July and August*

Hook.—No. 15 Bartleets B 7362 or, failing that, No. 17 down-eyed Pennell sneck—short.

Tying Silk.—Primrose, waxed with colourless wax.

Hackle.—One turn of *very* small darkish blue cockerel.

Whisks.—Two strands pale unfreckled neck feather of cock guinea-fowl—short.

Rib.—Yellow silk—five turns.

Body.—English squirrel's blue fur laid on thinly at tail and tapered to thickest at shoulder.

XII

Same. Substituting fine silver wire for yellow silk rib.

XIII

Hook.—No. 1 down-eyed round bend, or No. 15 down-eyed Pennell sneck.

Silk.—White, waxed with colourless wax.

Hackle.—Honey dun cockerel, very short—one turn only.

Whisks.—Two strands of pale unfreckled neck feather of guinea-fowl—short.

Body.—Cream-coloured fur from belly of baby seal.

Thorax.—Blue squirrel or hare's fur.

XIV

Hook.—As No. 15 or 16, down-eyed Pennell sneck.

Tying Silk.—Yellow; at shoulder only.

Hackle.—Pale honey dun cock, very short—one turn.

Whisks.—Pale-brownish blue neck feather of cock guinea-fowl tied in at shoulder so as to be short beyond body when body material wound on.

Body.—*Abdomen*: One strand from three-ply yellow silk going greenish olive when wet, tied in at shoulder with the waste end towards the tail, wound over whisk and bare hook to tail them once under the whisk and back in taper to shoulder.

Thorax: Hare's poll or, for variation, squirrel's blue fur.

XV. *May to August*

Hook.—No. 16 down-eyed Pennell sneck.

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Tying Silk.—Crimson or hot orange for head and thorax; white for rest of body. Both waxed with colourless wax.

Hackle.—Pale-reddish centre with white points—quite short.

Whisks.—Two strands palest (but not white) neck feather of cock guinea-fowl—short.

Rib.—Fine silver wire.

Body.—*Abdomen*: Baby seal's fur—cream colour.

Thorax: Rabbit's poll dyed in Red Ant dye.

A very useful pattern, where the nymphs which look as if they bled at the head are taken.

XVI

Hook.—No. 16 down-eyed Pennell sneck.

Tying Silk.—Cream, waxed with colourless wax.

Hackle.—Medium dun hen with pale points—one turn.

Whisks.—Two strands creamy neck feather of cock guinea-fowl.

Rib.—Fine silver wire.

Body.—*Abdomen*: Whitey grey fur from hare's shoulder.

Thorax: Darker fur—in a variety of shades—from blue English squirrel or hare's fur. On its day a very deadly pattern.

XVII

Hook.—No. 16.

Tying Silk.—Cream, waxed with colourless wax.

Hackle.—Palest ginger hen—one turn—short.

Whisk.—Two strands of palest creamy neck feather of cock guinea-fowl—short.

Rib.—Fine silver wire.

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Body.—*Abdomen*: Pale rabbit's poll.

Thorax: Hare's poll, or, for a variation, English squirrel's blue fur.

BLUE-WINGED OLIVE

XVIII

The nymph of this insect is sometimes, but not often, taken during the daytime—much oftener at night. Then (though why I have never been able even to surmise) a pattern dressed thus will sometimes be taken greedily.

Hook.—No. 1 or 2 down-eyed round bend.

Tying Silk.—Hot orange.

Hackle.—Dark but definitely blue hen—as woolly in the fibre as can be had—two turns.

Whisk.—Three strands of dark hen hackle—short.

Body.—Cow-hair the colour of dried blood, dressed fat—the nymph itself being fat and not taper like the other dun nymphs.

In the daytime I have occasionally had trout on an actual imitation of the nymph, using two shades of olive seal's fur to match the upper and lower parts of the insect. It is not possible to describe the exact shades.

I have also, when trout have been taking Blue-winged Olive nymphs during the daytime—a rather violent type of rise—had occasional success with a pattern dressed thus:

Hook.—No. 1 down-eyed round bend.

Tying Silk.—Ordinary orange.

Hackle.—Dark blue.

Whisk.—Three strands of close-freckled partridge hackle.

Body.—Fur of blue Persian cat strongly dyed in picric acid—becoming a rich green.

For grayling taking Blue-winged Olive nymphs in the day-

NYMPH FISHING FOR CHALK STREAM TROUT

time I have also used, with a measure of success, a pattern dressed as follows:

Hook.—No. 1 down-eyed round bend.

Tying Silk.—Orange.

Hackle.—Greenish olive cock.

Wing Cases.—Brownish-blue starling wing feather.

Whisks.—Three strands of partridge closely freckled brown hackle.

Rib.—Fine gold wire.

Body.—A mixture of a variety of seal's fur, olive and green and yellow with a hint of orange and red, all mixed with hare's poll and the green dyed fur above described—to make it spin easily—but I never found this pattern of any use for trout.

XVI

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IT may be a matter of comment that in this short work I have made little or no reference to the work of other writers on the subject. The bibliography on the subject is small. Of the art in its present form little has been written. But necessarily there have been forerunners.

The Rev. Richard Durnford, whose *Diary of a Test Fisherman*, 1809 to 1819 (published in 1911 by Mr Henry Nicoll), I have mentioned before, showed himself well aware of the nymphing habits of the Test trout. For example, on page 6 of the volume he says: "Taken from the stomach of a trout, they are the nymphae of the gnats ascending through the water before they take wing". His fishing however was usually done in rough water with more than one fly, and no doubt partook a good deal of the nature of that "fishing the water" which is the root of the purist's objection to the wet fly (and the nymph).

In 1863 came Dr Cutcliffe's extremely clever little volume on Devonshire troutting, *Trout Fishing in Rapid Streams*. His patterns are all hackled patterns, rather bulky, and are dressed with sharp bright hackles which would make the flies dance in the waters of the tumbling streams he frequented. But he let fall at page 118 the observation:

I find so much spoken about the natural fly and its imitation, but little about the insect before arrived at its maturity. How seldom does one imitate the larvae or pupae of the several insects! Many of them must [sic] necessarily be often washed into the

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water and devoured by the trout; and if looked into these will be found more like the hackle flies I use than are any flies in their perfect state.

Francis Francis (1867) with his historic sentence: "The judicious and perfect application of dry, wet, and mid-water fly fishing stamps the finished fly fisher with the hall mark of efficiency". But a subsequent sentence shows that his wet fly fishing was also the "fishing the water" order. "As a rule rough weather is more favourable to a sunk or wet fly while bright and calm weather favours the dry one." And he doesn't seem to have been aware of the nymph.

F. M. Halford in *Dry Fly Fishing in Theory and Practice* (1889) states that it is easy enough (as in fact it is) to dress an excellent representation of the natural nymph—but as he expressly declares that it will be quite ineffective he can hardly be considered a forerunner.

I believe my own first timid experiments, first described in book form in *Minor Tactics of the Chalk Stream* (1910), come next in order of date, though I imagine Dr J. C. Mottram must have been working on the subject about the same date, for the *Field* of the 5th February, 1912, contained a longish article by him over the pen name "Jim Jam", illustrated with two patterns of nymphs, used apparently for fishing, down-stream and dragging, for bulgers. Subsequently, in his book *Fly Fishing: Some New Arts and Mysteries*, first published in 1915, he had, under the chapter-heading "Nymphs and Bulgers", an eloquent and, I thought and think, convincing exposition of the then new school of Nymph Fishing. I gather from a recent paper of his in the *Fly Fishers' Club Journal* that he has recanted, and I am sorry—for him.

The next book dealing with the subject was *The Way of a Trout with a Fly* (1921), in which two methods of dressing

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more precise and detailed representations of the nymph are described and illustrated.

Henry Nicoll who, as before stated, published *The Diary of a Test Fisherman* (the Rev. Richard Durnford, 1809 to 1819) in 1911, published another volume in 1923 called *Salmon and Other Things*, on page 53 of which he writes:

On some days the trout will not take surface flies, and your beautiful little dun may float down without being regarded by fish either small or great. On such days trout may be taken by fishing just under the surface of the water, and perhaps this method affords the most enchanting sport the chalk stream yields.

A hot sunny day is to be desired. The fisherman wanders slowly up the river until a fish of a worthy size is spotted. The fish must look intelligent and be taking notice. If he is watched it will be seen that he opens and shuts his mouth from time to time in the act of feeding. He does not take any floating duns which may come down, occasionally he just breaks the surface of the water, but it is not often.

Then the angler looks out his under-water flies which range from a fat black alder, or a Coch-y-bonddu, down the scale to small things of hackle and fluff. Whatever the choice of fly may be, it is wetted in the mouth or in the river and lightly dropped a few inches in front of the fish. If all goes well you can almost hear the fish say, "Here is a fat drowned alder, or a delicious little beetle, etc." Then you see the fish's mouth shut and the moment to strike has come.

At the time this was written nymph fishing had not become at all a common practice. Mr Henry Nicoll's own water was the Bullingdon tributary of the Test at and below Sutton Scotney.

Mr Eric Taverner's first work, *Divers Ways to Tackle Trout* (1925), is silent on the use of the artificial nymph, but his monumental *Trout Fishing from all Angles* (1929) had a good deal to say about the artificial nymph, its dressing and methods of fishing it—not only in chalk streams but in

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other waters—and he treats the claim of the artificial nymph as established and the battle for it as won.

So again does Colonel E. W. Harding in his *The Fly Fisher and the Trout's Point of View* (1931).

In Horace Hutchinson's *A Fellowship of Anglers* (1928) he recounts how the late Henry Birkbeck fished the Houghton Club water on the Test and fished successfully with flies tied by E. J. Power which "had a nymphish look to them". He also says of another member of the Club, Peter Haig Thomas, that "he was a great exponent of the 'brown nymph' and used it with deadly effect". Mr Thomas joined the Club in 1917 and retired in 1922. The book states that Henry Birkbeck "would often moisten one of his spiders to make it sink before coming to the fish".

Major John Waller Hills, P.C., M.P., devoted a chapter of the Second (enlarged) Edition of *A Summer on the Test*, published in 1930, to "The Nymph". I take the liberty to quote from page 243 a trio of sentences:

More and more each year does nymph fishing become a part of the modern angler's equipment, and he who does not possess the art is gravely handicapped. At the same time has come the realisation that this art is both difficult and delightful. It demands different qualities and it makes a different appeal, it opens a new field of observation and experiment, and it is as exacting a process as the other, for upon my word I find trout harder to catch under water than on top.

Major Hills' testimony is valuable, inasmuch as he was brought up on a difficult North Country river where the practice is to fish up-stream wet.

His subsequent book, *My Sporting Life*, published in 1934, devotes some pages to the art of nymph fishing. He says, "This is not only legitimate fly fishing but fly fishing of a high order, harder than the floating fly".

He had previously referred to the use of the nymph in his

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History of Fly Fishing for Trout (1921), where he describes it as “being built on new lines copying more closely the original”. He adds: “These are now being used extensively and with success in the shyest chalk streams”.

The next work dealing with the subject to which I need refer is my third volume, *Side Lines, Side Lights and Reflections* (1932), containing at pages 244-246 a description of my simplified method of dressing nymphs much as here expounded though in less detail—and the prescriptions of eleven of my more attractive patterns repeated from the autumn, 1931, number of the *Journal of the Fly Fishers' Club*.

Mr R. D'Oyley Hemingway (Hafren), in *Fly Fishing for Trout*, published in 1935, has a brief reference to nymph fishing; but, after saying that imitation nymphs are made which are fished with dry-fly action, but with the nymph sunken more or less, goes on, “Purposely I say no more about it, for nymph fishing is not for the beginner”.

Mr Roger Woolley, professional fly-dresser and tackle dealer (who has the somewhat exceptional qualification in his line of business of knowing something of anglers' entomology and of making a genuine endeavour to produce accurate representations of insects), published in 1932 a volume on fly-dressing called *Modern Trout Fly Dressing*, and in this he gave dressings of a number of nymphs of the *Ephemeridae*, but did not deal with methods of nymph fishing as an art or with its ethics.

Mr T. J. Hanna in his book, *Fly Fishing in Ireland*, published in 1933, pays nymph fishing the compliment of devoting his first chapter of seventeen pages to it—and he takes the occasion to protest against “the monstrous creatures offered as nymphs by some tackle dealers”. He himself does not belong to that class. The chapter deserves attentive reading, though I do not agree with all of it. In

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addition he gives later on some examples of his methods of dressing nymphs.

C. Ernest Pain in *Fifty Years on the Test* (1934) has a chapter, "Of Flies Good and Bad", in which he discusses cases of fish nymphing and bulging and recognises some of the nymphs now in use as looking very attractive, but makes no pronouncements on the legitimacy or otherwise of nymph fishing on chalk streams. He does not seem to distinguish between casting the nymph to selected fish in position feeding subaqueously and the "chuck-and-chance-it" method of fishing the water. Nor does he make it clear that he realises that fish in position are often taking the mature nymph as it rises to hatch and letting the hatched subimago go by.

Another writer—Pat Castle—whose book, *Descriptive Angling*, also came out in 1935, devotes two chapters to nymph fishing, but as he uses the term nymph in so catholic a spirit as to include the Red and Black Palmer, a black water-beetle and several other beetles, I can hardly quote him as writing of the nymph in the way in which I, and I hope many chalk stream anglers, understand it.

Captain Robert Hartman in his book *About Fishing*, also published in 1935, discusses nymph fishing at pages 254 and 255. He says:

To the dispassionate angler there is nothing reprehensible about catching a chalk stream trout on a nymph. The nymph is not a magician, it is not a deadly lure that will denude the river of fish. In point of fact it is less killing than the dry fly, but it has the merit of catching fish which are not in the mood to take the fly on the surface. Considered ethically there can be no difference between fishing with an artificial ephemera designed to represent the insect a minute before it becomes a dun and fishing with one which represents the same insect a minute after it has ceased to be a nymph. Both are representational forms of ephemera fishing and if one of them is fair play, so, also, must be the other. This

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volume contains instruction for dressing two types of nymph, which he appears to consider sufficient for all purposes. This would not be enough for the Itchen.

There are probably no two rivers, chalk stream or otherwise, where the conditions are exactly alike, indeed they vary from length to length of the same river. So one may find the trout behaving very differently, on one part being much given to nymphing, on another much more generally taking the fly on the surface.

On the stretch of the Itchen at Itchen Stoke I have seen the trout pegging away gaily at the floating fly, while two or three miles down they have been busy nymphing and letting the subimago go by.

In 1935 Lancelot Peart published a book called *South Country Fishermen*, written strictly from the dry-fly point of view by a man residing on the banks of a chalk stream (I imagine the Kennet) and able, therefore, to get on to the water at all times whenever conditions were attractive. While admitting that the use of the nymph has had a great deal of success he holds that

to preserve a dry-fly stream entirely at its best, no under-water fishing whatever should be permitted. It reeks too much of hypnotism and over-solicitation. One may admittedly get more fish by adopting the principle of a method for a moment, and by repeatedly ringing the changes in one's technique.

But he is convinced that the ultimate result of such procedure is no less calamitous than a falling off of rising fish. They get no rest. Whether feeding on the surface or subaqueously they never can be free from care. There is always the need for vigilance if the cold cruel steel is not to be an affair of bitter experience rather than an unpleasant possibility.

I am doubtful, however, whether this author realises how

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often the nymphing fish in position is hammered by dry-fly purists because he seems to be rising.

Mr L. R. Peart in a recent book, *Fishing in the Making: The Management of Chalk Streams*, has a few words on nymph fishing, and, while paying a tribute to the skill and pleasure involved, says:

it takes a very good water to stand up indefinitely to nymph-fishing or up-stream fishing with the wet fly. On a hard-fished water trout get no rest at all. Someone is for ever hammering at them with a wet fly or nymph. *Nymph fished during a rise is a different matter altogether.* But few men with a nymph on their cast can resist a throw at every trout they see *whether he is feeding or not.* Extremely wary trout are the inevitable results.

The italics are mine. With every due respect to Mr Peart this is unmitigated nonsense. No angler who had the most elementary knowledge of his job would cast a nymph to a fish that is not feeding—either obviously coming to the surface or hovering to take the insect life brought to him. At any other time he is either hugging the bottom or hidden in the weeds.

I quote also from the same work from a chapter, “The Problem of the Fishing Club,” two suggested rules which are relevant:

(1) No down-stream wet-fly fishing to be done whatever. It is certain to result in trout being shy.

(2) Nowadays, educated up to the art by such men as Mr G. E. M. Skues, many anglers use up-stream wet flies and nymphs. I am well aware that there is no little skill in these methods and much pleasure to be derived from it. In my opinion, however, it takes a very good water to stand up indefinitely to nymph fishing or up-stream fishing with the wet fly. When these practices are abused, as they very frequently are, the quality of the fishing is bound to fall off. On a hard-fished water trout get no rest at all. Someone is for ever hammering at them with a wet fly or a nymph. *Nymph fished during a rise is a different matter altogether.* But few men with a nymph on their cast can resist a throw at every trout they

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see whether he is feeding or not. Extremely wary trout are the inevitable result. Thus, before permitting methods of this kind, I would always put the matter to the vote and abide by the decision of the majority of those fishing the water.

A wet fly may be permitted in such places as hatch-holes and weir-pools. The stock of trout in such places is apt to be heavy compared with other parts of the river, while there, too, will be found old fish which are better out of the water. Big fancy flies, however, should be prohibited. So should sink-and-draw methods.

The italics are mine. According to my experience it is of little use to cast a nymph to a trout that is not feeding. If he is in position to feed, he is invariably feeding.

Major R. C. Simpson in *Fish and Find Out* (1937) has a chapter on "Nymphing and Notes on Wading" in which he likens nymph fishing to up-stream worm fishing in rough rivers. It is therefore not entirely in point in relation to nymph fishing on chalk streams, for the nymphs are cast (although up-stream) at large to search the water and not to individual fish in position.

There are of course many writers who assume that the sort of hackled wet fly used on rough streams is taken for a nymph. That is not my opinion. I think flies of that type are taken for flies caught and tumbled in the very act of emerging from the nymph stage, and only for the complete nymph if fished dragging. I do not therefore think that any further reference to such writers is required in this chapter, nor to such as deliberately describe long-hackled patterns as nymphs.

The latest book dealing with the subject (up to the date of this going to the printers) is W. Carter Platts's *Modern Trout Fishing*, which has an open-minded and appreciative chapter on Nymph Fishing, though I could wish that he had realised the distinction between nymphing trout which are bulging and trout which are taking the mature nymphs quietly and methodically under banks and in runs.

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